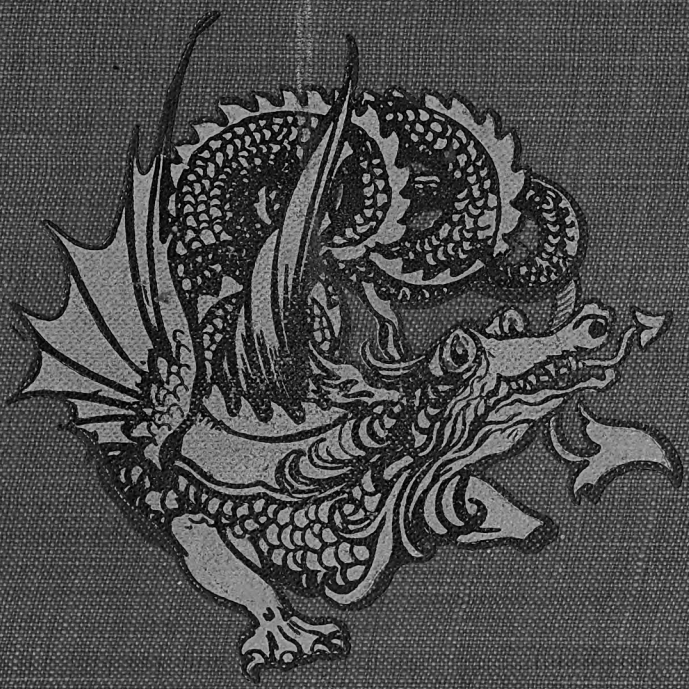
THE SECRET OF THE



DRAGON

P. H. Walker.
Portland.

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THE SECRET OF THE DRAGON

THE SECRET OF THE DRAGON

A ROMANCE ANCIENT AND MODERN

BY

MARY L. PENDERED

AUTHOR OF "THE FAIR QUAKER," "AN ENGLISHMAN," "MUSK OF ROSES," ETC.
AND JOINT-AUTHOR OF "THE CHAMPION."

"He will make
Nature ashamed of her long sleep: when art,
Who's but a step-dame, shall do more than she,
In her best love to mankind, ever could.
If his dream last, he'll turn the age to gold."

BEN JONSON.

LONDON AND NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS
45 ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1911

To MY BROTHER

JOHN PENDERED

In memory of childhood's world,
Its fancies, hopes, and fears;
And all the days when we have shared
Dear laughter or sad tears;
A chain whose links, well wrought in love,
Have strengthened with the years.

I WISH to record sincere and cordial thanks to my friend, Alfred Ewen for the very valuable help he afforded me in first drafting this book.

I am also indebted to a fascinating work on *The Occult Sciences*, by Arthur Edward Waite, which has been of great service to me.

THE AUTHOR.

THE SECRET OF THE DRAGON

PRELUDE

"It were well consonant with reason that he should show you whereby he knoweth it for a true and waking revelation, and not for a false dreaming delusion. . . . And himself is in himself as sure that it is a true revelation as that he dreameth not, but talketh with me waking."

Sir Thomas More.

SIR CHRISTOPHER MANWOOD threw himself back in his chair and gazed at the ceiling. On the table before him lay a stiff yellow manuscript, whose faint musty odour seemed to him not only a breath of the past, but a promise of the future. Only one more barred gate to leap, he was thinking, and the goal would be reached, that goal for which he had toiled so long. And the obstacle was not insuperable. He stared at the ceiling, in his favourite attitude, for some time, as if trying to follow the flight of his own soaring hopes and ambitions; then his eyes fell to the low square window that opened upon a thicket of red chimney-pots. But although his gaze was bent upon this grotesque forest of queer shapes, a vastly different picture was painted on his mind, vague in the gloaming of sense, yet richly coloured by fancy. A country house of early Tudor date stood there, set in a green and mazy garden such as Bacon loved, with moss-

grown paths winding through great hedges and gnarled trees, by broken statue and silent fountain. The vision pleased him well, but he turned from it back again to the yellow manuscript, whereon were inscribed, in crabbed writing, close lines that none but a student of old documents might decipher. Sir Christopher was such a student, and he read with ease the following matter :

" To my right trustie and wel-beloved Frende Christ^r Manwood be this letter delivered under pledge of Secresy, heartily desiring to heare of youre trewe welfare wiche I pray God preserve to the ꝺoie of your harte.

" Being come to the ripe age of thre score and nine and being warned by divers signes of ye fleshe that my daies on Erthe be number^d, it behooveth me now to seeke the good will and Prayers of al my Frendes, and of you I doe intreate a speciull Grace wiche I am wel assured you will not refuse me. To thee alone myn olde Companyon, doe I commend ye wondrous Secret I leve behynde and intruste to thy most carefull keeping untill such time as my Sonne Fulke doth come toe his ful estate of manhoode—or fayling him toe ye next heir of my bloode. For wel ye wot this matter maie not be spoke of without Grate Peril save to one of our owne Fayth and lerned in the Crafte. Garde it then right warily knowynge it will work woe and vndoing upon him who discloseth it before God willeth and Time be ripe. For I do hereby solemptly swear and pledge my Troth by the Holy Rood that God hath reveal^d to me ye Secret wiche diuers Men of al Time and all partes of the Erthe have vainlie soughte, and in the laboures of my handes and mynd have I been blessed. Nor bee ye affrayde with anie dismaie that I have wroughte agaynst

God His Will in this travail, or that Satanas was my seruant as ye Foolyshe beleeve. Knowe I am but this houre confest and shriuen at Peace with God and al His Saintes—for I have work^d naught but His Will according to His Lawes and ye Lawes of Nature.

"And now wil I vnfold ye waie to fynde the Secret—soe farre as it were safe to wryte. Knowe that it be garded by ye Dragon in his Court and the key thereof lyeth betwene the pages of Hermes Trismegistus in my Librarie, and shal be rede by ye Rime wiche compasseth Time. This moche onely dare I reveal.

"I recommend myself unto thee, mine old frende, as lowlie as I may, beseechynge thy good Prayers whereof nowe especiully doe I stande in sore neede—and evermore desiring thy soule and bodys hele.

"Y^rs til dethe and after dethe,

"Ansculf de Paganel.

"Wrytten at Paganel Garth ye Monday next after our Ladys Day this Xtian Yeare 1564."

At the foot of the document was a note in a different handscript, as follows :

"Receev^d by mee Christ^r Manwood but thre monethes before ye dethe of mine olde esteamed Friend —whose soule God assoil—and hid by me in ye secret place of ye Flemish Cabinet untill syche tyme as Fulke de Paganel shal come of age. God be with us all now and in ye houre of Dethe. Amen."

With many readings this manuscript had become so familiar that the present Sir Christopher Manwood had it by heart. Yet he pored over it again and again. Many things in it were plain to him. He knew why his ancestor had not fulfilled the behest made to him,

and delivered into the hands of Ansculf de Paganel's son the document revealing his father's cherished secret; for the annals of his family history informed him that Sir Christopher had died suddenly "of a cholick," some years before Fulke de Paganel came of age. And he understood perfectly the meaning couched under the quaint language of the letter, which might well have perplexed the uninitiated. To his skilled eyes every feature of the parchment had its inner significance. The cabalistic symbol stamped on the large splash of red wax at its foot and on its outer side, the strange signs marked here and there upon its margins, were pregnant with meaning to him. But there was one line that baffled his understanding still, and he returned to it again and again, dissatisfied with every attempt at solution.

"Ye Rime wiche compasseth Time."

But although puzzled, he was not in the least daunted, holding fast the conviction that to the determined man all doors, even secret doors, fly open. And he was a determined man. The fact that he had made the discovery of an infinitely valuable document, which had, as it were, been preserved from all other eyes during three centuries and more, for him to find at last, just when he most needed such a document, seemed to suggest design and point a directing finger to urge him forward. For the manuscript was to him less a revelation than a consummation of hope deferred, and he was inclined to recognize in its appearance something more than mere coincidence. The time was surely ripe, the instrument chosen—himself!

A keen and patient student of science, consumed with avid curiosity and a passion for research, Sir Christopher had by no means confined his studies to

the area of physical matter, so called. He possessed in a marked degree the true scientist's imagination, ever slightly ahead of discovery, and a very modern craving for knowledge of the occult and arcane, a burning desire to bring all things within the domain of the knowable. The fascination, therefore, of such a mystery as now lay before him, awaiting solution, will be readily comprehended. It obsessed him completely; he would know no peace until he had unravelled the last clue. And the last clue was concealed there in the cryptic words: "Ye Rime wiche compasseth Time."

Upon the table beside the manuscript lay a pamphlet as essentially modern as the parchment was ancient. It dealt with the very latest discovery in science, a discovery that had set the whole world vibrating with new hopes and conjectures. Amid the brown leather tomes and crumbling parchment scripts with which the table was littered, this clean black and white booklet appeared inharmonious, yet the young man found it in the same key, and not out of tune with the past. He read now, for the twentieth time, a passage deeply underscored on a page well thumbed.

"Thus many superstitions of medieval times," it ran, "may be found to have a basis in scientific fact, then unknown to the world, but dimly surmised by the wiser men of their generation. We live before we are conscious of living, and the wherefore is the latest knowledge that comes to us. The wisdom of one age becomes the folly of the next, but in another age it may become wisdom again. Many of those opinions and beliefs we have intolerantly named 'absurd superstitions' are, in a clearer light, found to contain germs of truth, and how these germs are capable of

development who can tell? We still grope—perhaps must always grope—in twilight regions of hypothesis as to the ultimate cause and reason of things, but we are constantly finding clues to matters that have baffled our forefathers, and these clues stretch in one continuous line from past to present, from present on into the future. At all events, it is well to reflect"—and this Sir Christopher had underlined doubly—"*that the Philosopher's Stone cannot appear more impossible and preposterous to us than the suggestion of a Marconi message, or even an electric telegram, would have appeared to the mind of an ordinary Elizabethan man. And, indeed, beside this new marvel of the twentieth century the Philosopher's Stone becomes commonplace and insignificant.*"

The room was full of shadows now. The light outside had faded quickly to the tattoo of March rain, falling upon leaden roofs and turning chimney-pots a more vivid red. The metallic twang of a distant street-piano was mercifully deadened by that steady murmur of Nature's making. Sir Christopher went to the window and looked out once more upon that roofscape of ungainly forms, which had grown so familiar to his eyes during the past few years, still scarcely seeing them, for his mind was full of visions.

"I must be there somehow," he said aloud, for the habit of soliloquizing had grown upon him in his many hours of solitude. "I must be there, and not for a few hours of a day; for weeks—whole weeks. How to do so without rousing suspicion? De Paganel is a strange character, so wrapped in himself, his books, his thoughts, and his past that he cannot be easily reached. What is it my stepmother says? 'His manner is an armour impenetrable.' He would never

consent—only think me mad. And he allows no visitors to view the house. Why? Is he afraid its treasures will be rifled, or is there some family disgrace he wishes to conceal? I wonder!"

He rose and paced the room. An expression of obstinate, almost fanatical, resolve settled on his handsome features.

"But I *will* get in—I *will* find out. In his own interests, as well as in the interest of science, it is imperative I should prove the truth of my theory before I give it to him and to the world. It would spoil all to precipitate matters. And I may be wrong—on a false scent. How often have theories proved mere will-o'-the-wisps to the earnest student! Yet, right or wrong, deluded or inspired, the adventure beckons. We have so few chances of romantic adventure in this commercial age. Science alone is left to feed our imaginations. The only new worlds left to discover and conquer lie deep in the earth or about us in the air. I am a born adventurer, and this—this opens a veritable Atlantis to me. Why not? At the worst I shall but be branded a deluded fool. At the best—ah, what a revelation with which to shake the world!"

He paused by the fireplace and held out his hands to the waning fire. They were cold, for the intensity of his thought had drawn the blood from them. He piled on logs of wood, and turned the button that flooded his chamber with white light. Then he returned to the table once more, and searched for another book among the littered papers. It had a dingy green cover, and the title, in faded gold, was *Legends and Superstitions of the County of Withamshire.* It fell open at a marked page, where, under the heading of

"The Singing Monster of Paynel Garth," he read the following paragraph:

"A curious superstition is attached to Paynel, or Paganel Garth, the residence of Godwin de Paganel, Esq., close to the small village of Hernspool. It is said that, at certain seasons of the year, notably spring and autumn, the stone Dragon, or Wyvern, of great antiquity, which stands in the Court-yard at the north side of the house, is heard to utter weird noises, not unlike the tones of a human voice, but hollow and inarticulate. Persons have sworn to hearing it quite recently, and some have declared they saw a thin blue smoke issuing from the monster's mouth. Moreover, a hooded figure is said to haunt the place—supposed to be the spectre of one Ansculf de Paganel, who, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, was suspected of unlawful tampering with the Black Art. And in spite of the fact that a close investigation of his house from roof to cellar brought to light no proof of illegal practices, there remains to this day a popular belief that Ansculf de Paganel had dealings with the Foul Fiend, and few of the villagers care to go near Paganel Garth after sunset.

"The house dates from 1312, and portions of the early masonry remain; but it was almost entirely rebuilt a century later, when a certain Godwin de Paganel was knighted by Henry V. for gallant conduct at Agincourt. He was afterwards raised to a baronetcy, but the title was discarded at the time of the Commonwealth, when the fortunes of this ancient family had declined to a very low ebb, partly owing to its obstinate loyalty to the Stuarts and Church of Rome, partly to the spendthrift character of its heirs. The late Fulke de Paganel parted with the bulk of his estate, as well

as with most of the family jewels and many valuable pictures; but the library has remained untouched, and is said to be unique in its collection of early books. The mansion has been allowed to fall into decay, especially the chapel, which is almost a ruin. Its hoary and neglected aspect lends an air of romantic plausibility to the quaint superstitions that have gathered about the old house, and, although its present owner declines to admit visitors to view the interior, the exterior is well worth seeing by those who can appreciate the beauties of Tudor architecture."

Sir Christopher laid down the green book, and fixed his eyes once more on the grey fading window. There was light in those eyes now, and he looked prime for adventure. Student, dreamer, thinker, he was none the less man of action, and bore the stamp of resolute activity upon his well-knit limbs, capable hands, and decided features. When once he set foot forward, such a man would never turn back. A glance told that. Again he murmured his thoughts to the crackling fire and pattering raindrops.

"These fine old legends—what landmarks they are, what aids to history and discovery! Bless the simple ignorance and crude beliefs of peasant folk, say I, for without them we should lose half our knowledge and all our poetry. I could wish I had been an unlettered clown in Elizabeth's day, if only to possess a living faith in ghosts and goblins and the religion of my fathers. Life must, indeed, have been replete with thrilling interest then, scarcely ever free from grisly terrors, open to the assaults of devils and visits from the dead; while the fear of hell-fire awaiting the sinner must have lent a piquant flavour to sin. How flat and tame life seems now by comparison, how level and

monotonous the path to age! We have only amusements now in the place of exciting adventures and acute sensations.

"Ah! but there is *this*—this, the possible 'open sesame' to the Genie's Cave, the key of the future! And who knows what wonders it may yet reveal—wonders more amazing and incredible than modern research has ever brought to light. Who knows that it may not inspire us to new beliefs, scatter old errors, revolutionize society? And what can offer a wider scope to a man's ambition than the thought of opening up new possibilities, new hopes, to his jaded fellow-men? I ask no better prospect than to grow grey in such service. Life would be worth living thus, even were every other joy and interest withheld."

The staccato notes of the piano-organ sounded nearer, and drowned the rattle of rain on the window-glass. It was playing the tender refrain of a modern love-song; but Sir Christopher did not hear it. He was too absorbed in his own thoughts, his vaulting aspirations. The only words he could fit to the tune were those that haunted his sleeping and waking dreams:

"Ye Rime wiche compasseth Time."

THE STORY

CHAPTER I

"Lauander is for louers true,
which euermore be faine;
Desiring alwaies for to haue
some pleasure in their paine,
And when that they obtainèd haue
the loue that they require,
Then haue they al their perfect ioie,
and quenchèd is the fire."

(*A Nosegaie alvvaies sweet, for Louers to send for Tokens of loue at Newyeres tide, or for fairings, as they in their minds shall be desposed to write.*)

A FEW little daisies shone up between the Court-yard stones, to show that Spring was truly come. They were the first coins of her lavish hand that would soon fling gold and silver over the meadows, and they smiled hopefully in the morning sunshine falling through the great wrought-iron gates that screened Paganel Garth from the wide, grass-bordered road outside. Pattering with red feet among the daisies, a few grey doves pecked and poked between the flagstones—last survivors of an ancient family which had lost caste and mixed its patrician blood with the lower races of the woodlands. They dwelt in the old dove-cote that stood in the middle of the yard—a wreck of its former beauty—and lived, as their wild relatives, on their own exertions; for there was no longer a full granary

here, as in past years, on whose store they might fare fatly without effort.

The Court-yard was very often in shadow, being walled in by two sides of the house and the crumbling Chapel, while a mighty elm on the road by the gate darkened one corner of it. But now the soft amber light fell upon the mossy stones, glorified the dilapidated dove-cot, and gleamed back from the nails in the heavy oaken door that stood up above the two short flights of worn green steps leading to it. This was the main entrance, and on either side of it was a narrow terrace, or balcony, roofed over by upper rooms and running along the front and left side of the house, above arched ways to the long-disused stables and out-houses.

From this balcony came the sound of a voice singing an old song :

" Lavander is for Lovers true,
which evermore be faine ;
Desiring alwaies for to have
some pleasure in their paine ;
And when that they obtained have
the love that they require,
Then have they al their perfect joie
and quenched is the fi-re—
and quenched is the fire."

It was not a sweet or musical voice that sang these tender words. Truth to tell, it was cracked and tuneless, and the air of the song was somewhat hard to catch, being subject to the will of the singer. Moreover, it had a woeful minor strain that hardly matched the face looking out from the porter's room on the left-hand side of the Court-yard above the daisies ; for it was a pleasant, kindly face, with a hearty smile, a pointed chin, cleft in the middle by a deep dent, and

eyebrows arched in continual surprise. A large cap, some centuries behind the times, fenced it round, and hid all hair but an untidy wisp that streamed over one shoulder. Every now and again its owner put up a plump hand to tuck it back into its hiding-place, where it refused to hide, as she peeled potatoes and continued her slow chanting :

" Rosemarie is for remembrance
between us and night ;
Wishing that I might alwaies have
your presence in my sight.
And when I cannot alwaies have,
as I have said before,
Then Cupid with his deadly darte
doth wound my harte ful so-ore—
doth wound my harte ful sore."

She paused, to sigh deeply and apply the corner of her apron to the corner of her eye.

" Indeed, and so it is," she murmured, shaking her head and taking up another potato from the basket beside her. " Never was a truer word."

And the doleful air went on :

" Vi-o-lets is for faithfulnesse
which in me shall abide—

" And so it shall in very truth."

Hoping likewise that from your harte
you will not let it slide,
And wil continue in the same,
as you have now begunne ;
And then for ever to abide
then you my harte have wo-onne—
then you my harte have wonne.

" Cowsloppes is for counsell,
for secrets us between ;
That none but you and I alone——"

The clanging bell of the Court-yard gate gave her sudden pause. She rose, and wiped her hands on her

apron. The gate, a small entrance beside the great central one, was kept, as all the gates and doors of the old place, securely locked and barred. It had been a tradesmen's entrance in years past, but now no tradesmen came for orders, and visitors of any kind were rare. The singer clattered down the steps noisily, and opened the side-gate to a man who stood without, in livery of black and red.

"Here's a letter, ma'am," he said, "for the young mistress. She'll be pleased to have it, I'll warrant."

"And why-for should you warrant so?" demanded the serving-woman sharply. "Cannot the mistress have a letter without your remarks? Letters are common enough, goodness knows."

"But not here." He grinned. "No offence, Verily Trew, but 'tis the first letter I've brought the young lady for nigh on six months, and in a male writing, too. Who knows but it may lead to summat? Not as there's much chance of the lass finding a sweetheart, being as she never goes nowhere nor sees nobody. But there bain't no telling; and if this here letter be from a gentleman—as Mrs. Green at the post-office do declare—the whole village 'll be glad to hear on it."

"The whole village is a crock-eared, tittle-tattling, meddlesome, prying lot; and that's my opinion of 'em," retorted Verily. "Cannot Mistress de Paganel have a letter but they want to know the inside of it? You can go back and tell 'em what I say."

"If it 'ud been you, now, ma'am, it 'ud a-been different," said the postman, watching for the effect of his words; "for we all know as there's a letter to come to you some day, and after that we shall hear the banns called."

"Go along with ye!" A broad smile spread over her face. "Of all the impidence I ever did hear! What do you know about it?"

She came outside the gate, closer to him, her eyebrows more arched than ever. He was a young man, with a roguish smile, and seemed inclined for conversation.

"I know what I know," he said, with an emphatic wink, "and what most on us does, too. Why, the whole village be daily expecting your man to come back, wi' a pot o' money, and set the bells a-pealing." He paused, as she uttered an exclamation intended to be scornful, but having a ring of gratification in it; then he added casually: "There was a man as looked as if he'd been in furin parts at the Chough and Crow last night."

A ruddy colour stained Verily's round cheeks and ears as she inquired quickly:

"And what might he be like?"

"That I couldn't rightly tell ye, ma'am, as I only seen the back o' him as he got outer the coach. But he were brown i' the neck, and seemed tall——"

"Yes . . . yes." She came still closer to him, and spoke eagerly.

"With a bit o' masterfulness in his way, I thought, when he give the order for a bed. But I heard no more."

"What age was he of, should ye say?"

"About——" He glanced sideways at her, and his small eyes twinkled. "Well, I can't exactly tell, but he might be about your own time o' life. Not that I know what that is, o' course, but . . say . . . twenty-nine or thereabouts."

"Save the man!" cried Verily, with a delighted

laugh. "I shall never see thirty again, and that's the Gospel truth. Why, he's been gone over ten years ago."

The postman, who well knew that she was of an age verging upon fifty, and that her sweetheart had left the village twenty-five years before, tried to look as incredulous as he could.

"Well, if you be over thirty, Verily Trew, I can only say as ye wear uncommon well," he declared gallantly, and thereupon, just as their converse had grown really interesting, a voice from the house was heard calling, in a soft but penetrating tone:

"Verily! I want you, Verily."

The postman swung himself off down the road to the village, and the serving-maid reluctantly answered across the Court-yard: "I'm coming, mistress—I'm coming," as she shut the gate and barred it safely.

A girl stood leaning over the low parapet of the terrace, dressed in a gown of lavender print, such as housemaids are wont to wear of a morning, but of quainter design and thicker fabric than usual. The skirt was short, and gathered all round into the waist; the sleeves ended at the elbow in a full frill, and round the shoulders was a muslin kerchief that seemed to have been many times washed. A large holland apron covered bosom and front of skirt. As she stood there in the vivid light of the March sun she made a fair and wholesome picture to the eye; for her face was as delicately cut as a cameo, and had a cameo tint of jasmine whiteness that formed a rare alliance with her shadowy black hair and eyebrows. Her eyes were like the flowers of the borage—those stars of pure sapphire whose jet stamens lend them such a wondrous depth of hue; for so her long dark lashes lent

depth to her blue eyes. There was a wild-rose tint in her cheeks, and her mouth was red as a garden rose; a mouth eloquent of possibilities, and curved in lines that men have found irresistible throughout the ages.

In spite of her clumsy dress, it was plain that her shape was finely moulded and might in time become regal; but it was the shape of a very young girl, so slender and with such an exquisite poise of the neck from her shoulders that she looked taller than her actual inches. Her arms and wrists were beautifully rounded, her hands and feet small; but the former were a little roughened, and showed a less perfect fairness than the rest of her skin. She was smiling when Verily mounted the steps towards her, and her smile disclosed a pretty row of nut-white teeth.

"Verily, I believe there is an answer for me, and you have been delaying it. Oh, cruel, when you know how impatient I am!"

Her voice was low, and had a thrilling vibration in it that spoke of suppressed excitement.

"Yes, 'tis a letter, Honeysweet, and I would it might be——" Verily checked herself. "But it was that foolish young man kept me clacking at the gate with his silly gossip. Indeed, I could not get quit of him. He says there's a foreign stranger come to the Chough and Crow last night, with a brown skin and a masterful way of his own. Who knows but it might be——"

The girl, who had broken open her letter, broke into this discourse abruptly.

"Hearken, Verily," she cried; "it *is* an answer, and this is what it saith:

"'THE CHOUGH AND CROW,
"'24th March.

"'RESPECTED MADAM,

"'I am willing to work in your garden for the lessons you offer, as stated in the paper that hangs in the bar of the Chough and Crow, and I will wait upon you to-morrow morning, by your leave, at eleven o'clock.

"'I am, madam,
"'Your humble servant,
"'KIT SWITHUN.'"

"Well I never!" ejaculated Verily, clasping her hands; "and if it be not just like Jehoram to write that way! I'll warrant 'tis him come home. The postman said——"

"But the name is Swithun, Verily, and your true love was called Spratt."

"And what of that, indeed? Cannot a man change his name an he choose? Maybe Jehoram would take me by surprise. Maids ha' been taken so before, and why not again? Depend on it, Kit Swithun be no other than him who hath my heart. And—bless me! it is nigh on ten o' the clock, and here stand I gossiping, with all to do and in my oldest apron! I must go put on my best one, and a clean cap. Lord! how my poor heart doth palpitate at the thought of seeing Jehoram! Glory be—oh, my sweet Mistress Melisent, you know not what love is!"

Tears gushed from her eyes as Melisent laid a caressing arm round her neck.

"Do not—do not be too sure, dear Verily," she urged. "Maids have been deceived by their hopes before now, and why should he take another name? Come now to our toil, for we have wasted overmuch

time, and I must sit to my pillow seven hours a day at least, if the lace is to be finished at the month's end."

"Which please God it may be," quoth Verily piously, wiping her eyes; "for, lacking the payment, I do not see how we are to get enough coal for the cooking, still less the warming of the library. And we cannot expect every morn to be as fair and warm as this. Ah, Honeysweet, if we had but——"

"Never trouble thine head with 'if's,' Verily," said the girl briskly, and the old form of speech came so naturally from her lips that it did not sound strange. "They but make one weak, these 'if's,' and we have to be strong. When the lace is done, I can turn to the old loom and go on with the tapestry. If I can but finish that, we may have fortune in store, as I believe it will sell for much gold in London city. So take courage, Verily. The new Gardener, if he come, will help us greatly, for he will grow us many things we need to eat. But I misdoubt me about teaching him. Was it truly honest, think you, to say I could learn him Latin and French, when all I know is from books and my father? I have never been to school, as thou knowest, and am very ignorant of the way to teach."

"*You* ignorant!" cried Verily in amazement. "Why, Honeysweet, mistress, you are a thousandfold more learned and clever than any other lady I have ever seen or met with."

Melisent smiled. There was a flaw in the compliment, since Verily had lived with her during all the twenty years of her life, and had seen but few other ladies. But it would have been ungracious to remark on this, and the conversation finished there. The two went together about the work of the house,

to make clean and tidy the three bedrooms of the south-east wing, which had been saved from decay and kept for use. There were a great number more, large and small, but mostly small, for so were old rooms made. These were occupied only by ghosts of the past, by rats, mice, and spiders of the present, amid dust, mildew, cobweb, and dry-rot. To them Melisent rarely went ; they saddened her too much. Only one bigger chamber, hung with battered curtains and full of lumber, did she visit occasionally. It was there, stored in oaken chests and mighty presses, the ancient housewifely stores of the historic mansion lay preserved in musk and myrrh, rosemary and lavender, firmly locked away from devastating mouse and mildew. In one great press there were gowns and petticoats of many dates, some very rich and scarcely worn, others bearing in their stiff outlines the vague forms of long-dead wearers. Placed there in bygone ages by thrifty ladies of the house, they were now a veritable godsend to Melisent, as she was able to clothe herself and Verily almost entirely from them, and often mutely thanked her ancestresses for their wise provision and care.

To this chamber she paid a visit when she had swept the long picture-gallery (half denuded of its treasures) that led from the library to the rarely-used withdrawing-room, and had dusted the solid screen of black oak dividing it from the hall. Kneeling before a great press, she sought a robe more befitting than the lavender print she wore. It was meet to bear herself with dignity before the new gardener.

And Verily at the same time was changing her cap and apron.

CHAPTER II

" Beleeue me now
I am your man if you me need.
I make a vow
To serue you without doublenesse,
With feruent heart, my owne mistresse,
Demaund me, commaund me,
what please ye and whan ;
I will be stil readie, as I am a true man."

When as the Hunter goeth out.

By eleven o'clock the young mistress of Paganel Garth had finished the house duties begun at daybreak, and entered the Dame's Parlour, a room she loved and had made her own.

It was a fair, large chamber, hung with arras and facing the morning by a rounded window, whose greenish lozenge panes, cracked and dusty, gave but a chastened light, and lent an air of mystery to the shadowy life-size figures on the walls. Those opposite the window were the most vague. They represented a 'Dance of the Hours before Time,' wrought by Flemish hands in the fourteenth century, and, although the form of old Time, bearing a monstrous hour-glass, was still quite distinct, the Hours had faded to mere wraiths. On the other sides the woven pictures were far more clearly visible, and depicted scenes of slaughter, wherein St. George slew the Dragon, and wicked Saracens were being ruthlessly slain by Red Cross Knights. In one corner of the room stood an ancient loom for the weaving of such tapestry, with a

design upon it but little more than begun; while in another a closed spinet, inlaid with ivory and standing on four delicate legs, looked like a long high table, and bore upon its dark surface a bowl of snowdrops. By the open hearth was a deep cushioned settle with a high back, and two equally high-backed chairs stood by the gate-legged table of black oak near the window. These and the low window-seat were the only seats in the apartment.

On the table some books lay scattered, chiefly manuals of tapestry and lace-making, but among them an emblazoned *Book of Hours* in Latin and a much-worn *Romaunt of the Rose* in black-letter were lying near the old lace pillow that occupied an important position in the middle. It was a quaint and bulky pillow, with a shower of jewelled bobbins falling over a strip of yellow parchment, nearly six inches wide, and of a pattern whose secret would have been lost had not Melisent unearthed it from an old work-cabinet. Its name, 'Mayflie i' the Web,' had first attracted her notice, and she had found it to be of a tracery so fine that it might well have been woven by a spider.

She did not take up the pillow now, but sank beside it on the window-seat, with a sigh of rest, and gazed dreamily out of the open lattice into the green court beyond, wherein 'smale foules' made melody. She was always weary at this hour, but it was not weariness that kept her idle now. She was waiting—waiting and thinking.

The coming of the Gardener was an event in her eventless life. The new birth of flowers, the first nesting of birds, the flight of the swallows or chattering of sparrows before a storm, were thrilling occurrences,

to be noted with joy or fear. But the advent of a stranger was a thing beyond all knowledge, and not to be measured in advance. She could only form dim fancies of what it would be like, and these fancies quickened the blood in her veins to a rapid pace. Ever since she had written the paper which had been hung in the bar of the Chough and Crow for all to see, her mind had been full of qualms as to the wisdom of that action. Were not the villagers even now laughing at it—and her? She knew they were. It had seemed at first so simple and beautiful an inspiration, to offer all she had, her lore of French and Latin—in return for a few hours of labour in her garden. But such lovely ideas have an unhappy way of turning their grey sides outward and fading to the hue of folly, when the slow, calm hours have worked their will on us. Had it not been folly to suppose that any man would give the labour of his hands to feed his brain? It is true she had offered bed and board (a room over the disused stables and two meals a day in the kitchen) but what was that? And now, now that all uncertainty was over and the answer had really come, she was still haunted by doubts. Could it be that any rustic youth of the village had responded to her offer? Or was it out of idle, perhaps dangerous, curiosity that the man, Kit Swithun, came to her? She shivered with a strange, perplexing fear. It was all such an adventure, so novel an experience!

No maiden in her first romance had ever felt more deeply stirred with throbs of hopes and dread. For the letter meant much to her; maybe as much as a girl's first love-letter means to her awakened heart. With the vision of a gardener came visions of future delights—of delicious fruits and abundant vegetables,

of snowy cauliflowers, crimson beets, golden marrows, and potatoes like balls of flour—all, like good fairies, helping to save her scanty hoard of money. Well she knew how Verily's genius for expression in soups and stews and hashes needed but these simple fruits of Mother Earth to aid them, and how dear they were to buy in the village. For when one has no money to speak of, everything seems dear. And then to grow one's own vegetables, to watch the green shoots of the potato-plant rise above the soil, and catch the first glimpse of a celery-leaf—what joy! She had seen the earth break over a snowdrop before the tiny green spear came, and had grown many other dainty flowers from seed; but the only sign of a vegetable in Paganel Garth was a rank forest of wild rhubarb, the only fruit an accidental apple hanging all forlorn from the bough of a tree whose bearing power had long been over.

What wonder that, as she looked out of her dim green window on the tangled grass and shrubs, her heart rejoiced at the prospect of what might happen there?

Her reflections were broken by the sound of heavy footsteps as Verily came stumping along the flagged passage outside and entered the room. Her face was very mournful as she said, in an aggrieved voice:

"He's come. A personable man enough, but no more like my Jehoram than the cat's tail. If only I had worn a bit of vervain on me . . . But, there, I have no luck. The last time I blessed some and wore it for a whole week not a body came near the place."

"Which only shows there is no truth in the charm, Verily. Where is the Gardener?"

"In the kitchen. Will you see him here or there, mistress?"

"Here—here, Verily; and I pray you stay by me. I dare not speak with him alone."

"Bless the maid!" Her voice echoed in the hollow roof of the corridor as Verily clattered back to her kitchen. Melisent rose from the window-seat and sat herself with great dignity on one of the high-backed chairs, laying her hands on the carven claws that, grasping solid balls, formed its two arms. These she gripped convulsively when the sound of approaching footsteps rang once more on the stones outside. It was rarely she saw any man but her father, and she was terrified, as at the coming of some strange monster.

The Gardener entered. He was not at all terrible in appearance, being a slenderly-built man, somewhat under six feet in height, with an air of elasticity and strength that belied a certain droop in his neck. The darkness of his eyes against a fair skin and almost yellow hair would alone have made him noticeable, but that was not all. A squarely-cut chin, a piercing glance from under straight and well-marked eyebrows, a suggestion of restrained force and individuality in his shaven face, gave him a still more distinct character, and he bore himself with unselfconscious ease. His appearance was so much in his favour that Melisent breathed a sigh of relief. He was not formidable; he even looked appealingly at her, as if he, and not she, had most reason to feel abashed.

She welcomed him with a gracious smile, and bade him be seated, at which Verily frowned. She had been taught manners in an old school, where no servant ever sat in the presence of a mistress, and, although she herself was on terms of intimacy with her young

lady, she considered that the new Gardener man should be kept in his proper place. But her rigid look of disapproval was soon dispelled when she found that he shared her view of decorum, and remained standing.

"Before I accept your services, Kit Swithun," Melisent began, in a voice that trembled slightly, "I think it but just to tell you that the work will be very hard, for the garden is a wilderness. It hath never been tended in my lifetime, and the earth can have little virtue left in her, so long have weeds and wild growths had their way. Do you mind hard toil?"

"I come prepared to work hard, madam," replied the young man, "and I love difficulties. The wilderness of your garden makes me want to bring it into subjection. Let me wrestle with it."

She smiled, and then began to blush with what she had to say.

"But I am able to offer so small a guerdon. I—it is right you should know that I am not very learned. Do not speak, Verily." She raised her hand to silence the serving-maid, who had begun a protest. "All the Latin and other lore I have hath been learnt me by my father, or I have learned myself from books. You speak so well that methinks you have some knowledge of books yourself, and maybe I can teach you little. I would not hold you to an unfair bargain, and if——"

Here Verily would not be repressed.

"Take my word for it, Gardener, there is not a more learned young lady in the whole county, nor one more wise."

"I can well believe it," he responded gravely; "and I am quite content with my bargain. It is true I have been taught to read and write, and have been servant to a good scholar, who corrected my speech, so that

it may not be so broad as that of the villagers here. But I am ignorant of many matters which the young lady can teach me if she will, and I trust she means to hold by her offer of instruction."

"I will indeed, if you so please," declared Melisent, with joy in her face. "But I would have you see first the sleeping-place we have thought of for you. It is where the last coachman did sleep, and we will make it as comfortable as we may. But I fear me it will not be very agreeable. There are mice—perhaps rats——"

"I do not object to mice, or even rats," he said, smiling for the first time, and his smile was very pleasant. "Besides, perhaps I may have a cat to keep me company."

Melisent smiled back ravishingly.

"You like cats! Oh, then you shall have my Pearl. He sleeps with me now, but if we make him a nice bed, and you are kind to him, I am sure he will not refuse to bear you company. He is a wondrous huntsman, and can kill the biggest of rats, for all he looks so mild." She laughed gaily. "And now, will you see the garden? I have still a dread lest it should fright you."

Verily went back to her kitchen, and the Gardener followed Melisent through long passages to a door leading out upon a terrace, where broken steps led again to what had once been a lawn, bounded by a moat. There was no lawn now, nothing but shaggy tufts of coarse grass and a jungle of bushes, while the moat was only a dry ditch, stocked with wild hemlock and nettles. Beyond were fields—beautiful fields laid for hay by the farmer to whom Godwin de Paganel let these last remnants of his estate; and Melisent looked at them with loving eyes, for they were a great joy to

her. She told Swithun of the treasures they harboured, the cowslips, meadow-sweet, and forget-me-not to be found there later on, with totter-grass and sorrel, and wild thyme, and delicious white clover; to say nothing of the eglantine and honeysuckle in the hedges. Then she took him into every corner of the dear sad garden; showed him the old skittle alley, like a mossy tunnel; the bowling green, once exquisite sward, now a waste of dandelion and plantain; the herb garden, whose high walls were covered with the lanky survivals of long-unpruned and unbearing fruit-trees, and whose bushes of rosemary, lavender, juniper, and lad's-love had grown shoulder high. Here she pointed out the little plot she had reclaimed from chaos for the use of the kitchen, clean of weeds, and planted with flourishing mint, sage, parsley, fennel, and other aromatic things. A clump of borage, paradise of bees, flanked it on one side; on the other was a broad patch of the delicious bergamot, its fragrant leaves just melting from their early blush to a soft green.

They passed by broken statues, half hidden in tangled bushes, by the long-disused fountain, with its basin full of weeds, and by the once lovely Rose Pleasaunce, where the sundial stood. It was now hemmed in by a thicket of brier and bramble, but Melisent had kept its face clear, and the shadow of the March sun told the hour plainly. Round its rim a line of letters was still faintly visible, and as Swithun stopped to read them, Melisent quoted softly:

> "Fayre houres flie;
> Ye al must die."

"Time gives us warning," she added, smiling; "and perhaps it is well. For who would else think of death on such a morn as this?"

"Why think of sleep when we are wide awake?" was his reply; and she gazed at him thoughtfully for a moment before they passed on to the Dragon's Court.

It was an uncanny spot, gloomy even in the noontide of Spring; for it was enclosed on two sides by tall yew-hedges (against which now the budding trees behind stood out as vivid emerald), and on the other two by ivy-covered walls, those of the house and of the half-ruined chapel. From the house wall a great square chimney rose high, an enwreathed tower and abiding-place for many jackdaws, whose sharp speech told that they were busy nesting; and beneath it two rounded windows of old glass, one below the other, peered from their frame of lusty green.

In the middle of the court stood the Dragon, presiding genius of the scene, and for some moments Swithun stood before it fascinated; for it was indeed an evil-looking monster that coiled its great length in the tall coarse grass, one to haunt the mind in lonely places and the world of dreams. The creature had scaly wings, rising high, but sprawled upon its belly like a serpent, its long body curved in rings. Wide-open jaws, with jagged teeth and forked tongue, pointed upward at the gable of the house. It seemed as if the lichen that patched its horrid body had preserved it, in some sort, from decay, for it had suffered little at the hands of time. Two stunted animal fore-feet, which raised it a little from the ground in front, were broken: one had only the stump left; the other had lost some of its claw-like toes. The pointed tip of the right wing was gone, and a large piece had been broken off the left one. But, except for these mutilations, the Dragon lay, as it had lain for at least three centuries, unimpaired by wind, rain, or frost, a thing

grotesque and absurd, yet with a power all its own to compel a reluctant homage.

"Here," said Melisent, "is our wonderful Dragon. You may have heard of it."

As she spoke she laid her hand upon its grisly neck with a gentleness that suggested affection.

"It is, by all reckoning, a fearsome beast," he declared—"a materialized nightmare. Do you not often dream of it?"

"Very often, but not in terror. He is to me a friendly beast, as the lion was to Una, and I think he doth mean well by me. See here."

She led him round to where, on the south side of the court, a shaft of sunlight entered through a gap in the trees, and there, in a corner facing the hungry jaws of the monster, stood a rustic chair and table.

"In the summer I bring my work and my books here," she said. "Verily and I made this table and chair out of the branches of trees. Are they not well devised?"

"They are indeed." He answered her dazzling smile with a swift glance of admiration. "And you sit here alone—with the Dragon?"

"Yes. He is good company. Sometimes he sings to me."

"He does really sing!" the Gardener exclaimed, in a surprised voice.

"Truly. He may even now, if we wait. It is at this time of year he sings most, like the birds. Hearken!"

They stood silently for some minutes in a listening attitude. Presently a low murmur filled the air—a sound that Swithun had heard when they first entered the court, but had scarcely noticed it. It rose to a faint wailing cry, like the piping of the wind but

deeper and more human, then died away to a whisper; and it certainly seemed to come from the gaping jaws of the Dragon.

"Can you doubt longer?" said Melisent, turning her starry eyes upon the Gardener's face with such sweet faith shining in them that his incredulous smile vanished, and his scepticism fell abashed. Perhaps he realized that here was a child-mind to whom the world was all so wonderful and unknown that the supernatural only appeared as one more of its marvels to be accepted without understanding, for he said quite seriously:

"It is the first time I have ever heard stone sing, madam. It is very strange and interesting."

"But it is not the stone that sings," she replied; "it is the spirit of the Dragon within it, the Guardian of our house, or so it seems to me. Most people are affrighted when they hear it. Verily says the sound of it curdles her blood. But I have ever loved it, for to me it speaks of the past and sometimes of the future."

"What does it tell you of the future?" he asked.

"It tells me . . . Oh, I cannot say, but it comforts me . . . gives me assurance of hope. It speaks of life, of some living spark that will redeem us from the decay that reigneth here. But I do talk too much."

She drew herself up with a vivid blush of shame, for she had forgotten he was only the Gardener.

"Madam, you talk to one who knows his place," said Swithun respectfully, touching his battered cap. "All this you have said interests me greatly, for I am a believer in many things the world scoffs at, and know that out of strange places truth may come. Who can say what the Dragon may yet reveal?"

"Ah, if we but knew his Secret!" she exclaimed sadly. Swithun started.

"You believe, then, there is a secret?" he said, scrutinizing her with his strangely penetrating eyes.

She returned his gaze with a look of vague distress.

"I know not what I believe, Gardener, or whether it is belief at all. Perchance 'tis only feeling. I have always felt that the fortunes of our house lie in the Dragon's keeping. But it may be only a full-moon dream, a mad fantasy. Let us speak no more of it. I have shown you the garden. Are you still willing to work in it, now that you have seen its disorder?"

"I am willing. I wish to begin at once," was the answer.

"But," she faltered, and lowered the long black fringes of her eyes, "there is another thing I would fain say to you. My father . . . my father is ignorant of what I have done. He lives in his books and dreams, not heeding what happens around him. If he should ask of you why you are here, and what wages——" She paused.

"Have no fear. I will tell him I am Verily's cousin, serving apprentice here."

"But that would be a lie!" exclaimed Melisent, aghast.

"It is a lie I would have no fear to take upon my soul," said the Gardener calmly; "but perhaps it is not necessary. I need but tell Mr. de Paganel that I come to practise horticulture, having no land of my own, and that, in return for my labour, I am to have bed, board, and the experience I lack. Will this satisfy my lady's scruples? It will be quite true."

Melisent smiled and shook her head.

"I wish I could think it be quite true," she answered, "but I am not so foolish as that. You came . . . truly, I know not why you came. I believe God sent you. But my father is not like to concern himself much in the matter, and you may be able to satisfy him with a part of the truth. I hope so, for I would not have any man take a lie upon his soul. And now I will lead you back to Verily, and she shall show you the place she hath made ready for you. Come this way."

At the corner between the house and Chapel was a low stone passage, half hidden in ivy, leading to the front Court-yard. They went through it into the bright sunshine again, where the little daisies were dreaming and grey doves searching the flagstones for unconsidered trifles. There Melisent, turning to the Gardener, said: "I must leave you now, Kit Swithun; but after dinner I will see you again, and tell you what I would see done first in the garden, since you are quite sure that you do not repent you of your word."

"I do not repent me, madam, and am proud to be your servant," he declared, bowing low, with bared head, an attitude that seemed not strange to Melisent.

"And well ye may be proud," observed Verily from the terrace above them, "for a better mistress never was in this world, and so ye will find, Master Swithun."

"I know it already, ma'am," said the Gardener gravely; and to himself he added: "Could any man wish to serve a fairer or sweeter mistress?"

CHAPTER III

" The frost bites faire flowres;
Let's work at due howres;
Haste, haste and be merie,
Till our needles be werie."
(*Attend thee, go play thee,*
Sweet loue, I am busie.)

As Melisent went back through the Dragon's Court, a soft little wail smote her ear, and she gave a joyous laugh.

" Ah, Pearl, truant! Where hast thou been this morning? Did the Gardener fright thee?" she cried.

Stepping daintily down from the Dragon's body was a white cat of amazing size and beauty. He uttered another soft little crooning sound, and ran to Melisent with every manifestation of pleasure, submitting to be taken up by her and laid on his back in her arms, whence he looked up into her face and blinked contentedly. Her face softened and dimpled into childishness as she talked baby language to him, and she was no longer the dignified lady who had conducted Swithun round the garden.

It was strange how easily the fond mother-talk came to her lips, since she had seen but few babies in her life, and had never dandled one. But there are some matters in which we do not need experience to give us knowledge.

" Pearl," she said, changing her form of speech to a would-be severe one, " for thy many crimes of bird-

catching and nest-fouling thou art doomed to sleep with a monstrous ogre called Kit Swithun, and protect him from rats and mice. It is no good smiling and purring at me; I am proof against such wheedling, and thy doom is sealed. But he is not a very bad ogre, Pearl, and has eyes so deep and true and kind that I warrant he will not harm thee. Moreover, he likes little four-legged brothers who are called cats, for he told me so. But we must go work now, child. The day advances, and thy foster-mother hath been idle all the morning."

She carried him with her to the Dame's Parlour, and, laying him on the window-seat, took up her lace pillow, Pearl's detested rival. To his mind a lady's lap was ever meant for something soft and warm to lie in, not a cold hard cushion, spangled with bobbins. But he betrayed no sign of this reflection, and purred himself off to sleep in the chastened sunshine that smiled through the dingy window-panes.

It seemed, however, that Melisent was fated to get no work done this morning, for she had scarcely twisted a thread before the hollow voice of a gong sounded at a little distance, and she rose with a sigh. It was her father's summons, and could not be heard in the kitchen, which lay on the farther side of the square hall round which the rooms were gathered. There were no bells available in the house. They existed still, in long silent rows upon the kitchen walls, but all their wires were rusty or disabled. Therefore Mr. de Paganel used a gong, that could always be heard by her, and she could call Verily to answer it if necessary.

"Did you summon me or Verily, sir?" she asked at the door of the Library in which Godwin de Paganel spent the greater part of his time.

It was the most warm and luxurious spot in the old house, with two deep windows in alcoves catching all the light of the east and south, yet safe from icy winds; for the diamond-paned lattices had been carefully fitted into their grooves, and heavy curtains of rich fabric shut off their recesses. There were inner shutters, too, on strong hinges, to be closed and barred at will, so that not a breath of air might intrude uninvited. The two great open fireplaces at either end of the room, which, might have furnished draughts, were always filled with burning logs of pine or other wood from the overgrown garden, and gave off a gentle heat, with an aromatic odour very delectable. The easiest of chairs and couches, one of modern design, enriched with a brass reading-lamp and desk, were grouped about the hearths and tables. Everything breathed an air of comfort, in striking contrast to the dilapidated splendour and discomfort so apparent in all other parts of the house. On every side rose shelves full of books, all more or less valuable on account of their age, and some very rare editions. The library of Godwin de Paganel was the envy of book-collectors, albeit it was not catalogued, and its greatest treasures were but vaguely suspected. There were rumours of its possessing first priceless imprints from the presses of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde, St. Albans, Berthelet, Copeland, Islip, and other pioneers in printing; of Tudor translations, early folios of Shakespeare, and illuminated missals of great antiquity. But as many years had elapsed since any outsider had been vouchsafed a glimpse of the de Paganel library, no one could say positively how far these rumours were based upon fact. It was only known positively that a first edition of *An Excellent Conceited Tragedie of Romeo and*

Juliet, 1597, had a place there, together with a famous one of Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose,* and early impressions of Brant's *Shype of Fooles,* Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia,* Malory's *Morte d'Arthur,* and Heywood's *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels,* besides the finest collection of works on Alchemy and Magic in the United Kingdom.

These had a whole section of the Library to themselves, and ranged from floor to ceiling on either side of the south window that looked over the dry moat to the meadows beyond :—Hermes Trismegistus, Cornelius Agrippa, Geber, Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Van Helmund, Lully, Raymund, and a host more adepts in that occult lore that has fallen into disrepute during the march of centuries. Volume after volume stood there in their leather covers, thickly coated with dust, preaching a sermon on the capricious fashions of thought, on the vanity of science and the worthlessness of fame. For their present owner took no heed of them, and they were all lost to the world they had sought to benefit.

Godwin de Paganel was a man of whims and prejudices, and it was one of his prejudices that literary form only was valuable. Richness of thought, fertility of ideas, brilliant discoveries of research—all had no weight with him ; he asked but the finished product of art, the perfectly expressed poem, the exquisitely moulded vase. In his opinion no true literary work worth reading had been written since *The Vicar of Wakefield,* and in order to preserve this opinion he refused to read any story of later date. *Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy,* and *Pamela,* he had indeed attempted, but put them aside unfinished with a shudder. Their realism and looseness of form dis-

gusted him, and he had the most fastidious horror against aught humorous, amorous, or sensational. To him science was irreverent, life vulgar, and all the philosophy and poetry ever likely to be written had already been written.

With one exception, which will be disclosed in the following pages.

He was sitting at the table, writing, when Melisent opened the door and asked her question; a man of nearly fifty years, with the face of a lovely boy. His eyes were limpidly blue, not so deep as his daughter's, but of an appealing sweetness and serenity that had never failed to obtain for himself a tender reverence. Delicately framed, he bore himself with perfect grace, and possessed every sign of good breeding in his well-shaped hands and feet, his finely-cut features, and proud poise of the head. His hair, raven black, had scarcely a grey thread in it; his face was fair and smooth as a girl's; his smile was ravishing. He rose when his daughter entered, and greeted her with the homage due to any lady.

"It was for Verily I rang, Ladybird. The fires need replenishing."

Melisent went to the hearth and threw on the logs that lay ready on either side. No thought of reproach entered her mind, although her father could have done the same so easily, and Verily had much to do elsewhere. But both Melisent and the maid were accustomed to wait upon him ungrudgingly, and habit soon becomes a law of life.

"It is quite warm out of doors this morning, my father," she said, on her way back to the door.

"I do not doubt it, to those who are moving," he replied, with his sweetest smile, in a voice like the coo

of a ring-dove. "But to one who sits long, and to whose head the heart is pumping continually, the blood becomes languid. Feel my hands, dear child."

The girl came across the room to him, and clasped both his soft hands in her own warm, coarsened ones. She grieved at their coldness, and implored him to go out into the sunshine, where, she added, "the birds are singing like a choir of seraphim."

"Pretty," said her father, smiling and drawing towards himself a sheet of paper. "Such a dainty phrase shall not be lost, Melisent; it shall go down to the ages. And now, wouldst like to hear thy father's latest thought, coined into exquisite prose? It came in the night, like a flash of celestial fire, and I rose to make a rough note, the which I have since perfected. It is now written in my book. Wilt hear it?"

"If you please, sir." There was little enthusiasm in her voice, for she desired to go back to her work, and could not always fully appreciate her father's inspirations.

He took up a dainty vellum-covered volume binding many sheets of creamy blank paper, and clasped with gold. In the first half of it fine small handwriting, having a suggestion of Greek in the formation of its letters, occupied the middle of each page, with a wide margin on each side. He turned to the last entry made there, and, leaning back in his chair with a smile of great felicity, read as follows:

"In the moon-haunted watches of the Night, when the silent hours troop like pale ghosts through the dim aisles of Time, there comes suddenly upon the Soul, wrapped in its cloak of slumber, a strange glimmer that is of the Dawn, yet not that Dawn the sun awakens. For it is a light which irradiates the eyes of the spirit

only, an arrow of fire that shatters the gloom as a voice may shatter the silence. And, in sooth, it is not only a flash, but a cry, the birth-cry of an Idea! It came to me, and my Soul hailed it as a mother hails her new-born child, with thrills of fervent ecstasy; knowing it to be part of myself, born of my Spirit. And this is the Idea that came to me in the moon-haunted watches of the night—the *Value of Perfection*. What availeth it the soul of man to produce only that which is a feeble and imperfect copy of the Eternal Form of Beauty? The Perfect Thing alone is worth the making. And if it should take the whole of my days upon earth, were it not better to give to the world one gem of the purest ray, cut and polished to its most transcendent possibility of beauty, than to discover a gold-mine of rough ore that can but enrich the vulgar?"

He concluded with an air of triumph, and looked at his daughter with shining eyes.

"It seems to me," he continued, assuming a half-apologetic tone which belied his whole aspect, "that I have been able to mould my thought into a form not quite unworthy of it. Perhaps a word here and there might be recast. I think 'rude ore' would have a softer ring than 'rough,' and . . . yes . . . 'transcendent height of beauty' is better than 'possibility,' a common, ugly word." He paused a little and reflected. "I have it—'to its most puissant height of loveliness' . . . yes . . . that gives a delicate cadence, a faint old-world charm. I should always read over my work aloud, for certainly the ear aids the eye. What think you of this passage, my daughter?"

"It is beautiful, and yet——" She paused.

He interrogated her with his eyebrows.

"And yet we must have gold-mines, sir," she murmured, with a kind of shame-face.

"I grant that, my child. But they pass, and nothing is left worth the keeping. Great thoughts, jewels from the mind, remain, and that is why my book shall be immortal. I will so purge all dross from it that nothing shall be left but the element of perfection and immutability, pure metal of the soul, as far above the golden ore of mines, the filthy lucre of the world, as the heavens are above the earth."

"Yet would we had more of that same golden ore, that filthy lucre!" she exclaimed impulsively, then bit her lip, for what, indeed, was the use of such a speech? It could only shock her refined and fastidious father, who lived in another world than hers. He looked pained.

"Ah, Melisent, I fear me thou art sadly mercenary and practical for so young a maid," he said, shaking his head sadly. "I grieve, because I have tried to train a love in thee for beautiful and precious things—for art, poetry, virtue, philosophy, and all that can satisfy the spirit alone. But thou art only half my child; thy mother hath part in thee, and she—sweet dame!—had a lamentably prosaic side to her nature."

"I have heard you say, sir, that my mother was an angel," Melisent exclaimed.

"She was. An angel of goodness and unselfish devotion. I felt myself unworthy such devotion, albeit no man could have loved her more truly, or shown a tenderer regard and respect for her. Yet I must fain admit that she thought of money and mundane things. It was to pleasure her I sold the valuable pearl and ruby carcanet bestowed upon our

ancestress, Godyth de Paganel, by Queen Mary, which you, my child, will go lacking."

"In truth, I have no desire for it," cried Melisent. "Was it not sold to pay our debts?"

He mused a few moments. "The debts would have been paid, Sweetheart, in time. But thy mother was too timorous, too concerned, too careful over many things. She could not rest secure in her own goodness and trust all would be well. God rest her soul!"

He made a vague sign of the Cross at these concluding words, a concession to the picturesque faith of his fathers, from which he had never wholly departed, though he had not seen the inside of a church since his wife died. Melisent followed his example mechanically.

"I must go now, my father, to the work I have left so long, for it will soon strike the dinner-hour," she said, turning away.

He laughed musically.

"Little materialist! Thinking of dinner now! And pray what hath taken thee from thy work this morning?"

She hesitated, then plunged.

"It was a gardener man, who came to offer his services—for—for a meed of food and lodging."

"But that is fortunate, child. The garden needs attention badly. No doubt he hath been attracted hither by the greatness of our name, and the ambitious desire to be known as Gardener at Paganel Garth. I shall be pleased to find him books of horticulture. There is one on vineries, I know, somewhere, and another I dimly remember on the growing of magnolias and tuberoses."

"I thank you, my dear father. But at present——"

"Would that I were a gardener!" sighed de Paganel. "How I should enjoy the free exercise of digging in the glorious brown earth! It is such a sweet, natural, human delight that one envies the clown who can indulge it. But my book must be my first thought, and manual toil is apt to clog the delicate processes of the brain. I shall take pleasure in it vicariously by watching the Gardener. I hope he hath no bad habits, doth not drink, or smoke vile tobacco. I could not endure if he tainted the air of the garden with evil odours."

"He will not," answered Melisent decidedly. She was prepared already to stake her life on the well-doing of the Gardener.

"If you are sure of that, I give him full permission to work on my estate," said Mr. de Paganel magnificently, and dismissed the subject from his mind.

Melisent breathed freely as she went out, closing the door softly behind her. No questions! Her father felt no curiosity about this strange man who had offered to labour in his garden for nothing but bed and board. But then, his indifference was nothing unusual. He lived apart, and had no concern with the struggles of the little household to which he stood as head. Its poverty did not harass him; the knowledge, if he ever faced it, that his daughter, at the age of twenty, was toiling the whole day in order to keep out of debt and supply him with the small luxuries to which he was accustomed did not give him a moment's uneasiness. That the allowance he made for household expenditure out of his absurdly small income from the grass-fields about the house, the last

remnants of the once great estate, could barely have kept the little family in bread and cheese, may not have occurred to him ; he never indicated that it did. And he ignored the fact that Verily had received no wages for many years as calmly as he permitted the one remaining lady of his race to perform the laborious duties of a housemaid, also unpaid. For Godwin de Paganel had enshrined himself in a niche apart, and lived in a rarefied atmosphere that made him shrink from the common air breathed by his fellow-creatures. As he would have phrased it, his soul dwelt beyond the world of sense, and he was but half conscious of the ugly, carking cares that trouble humanity. And so his life was wrapped in a golden tissue of dreams and aspirations, sheltered by the four walls of his Library, and kept from rude shock or tarnish by the care of the two faithful, loving women who ministered to him.

They both loved him with a reverential affection scarcely due to his qualities ; for he possessed the power of inspiring that kind of tenderness and worship in women. Melisent, therefore, did not find it in her heart to call his indifference in question, or blame him for the little interest he manifested in the affairs that absorbed her. She had nothing but loving thoughts of him as she returned to her interrupted work and set the bobbins flying with her nimble fingers. The morning had been full of unwonted excitement ; her brain and hands were alike stimulated, and a new joyous hope was born within her. The hope had no words of its own, and only those of an old song came to her mind and fell from her lips, to be crooned softly as the bobbins flew—a song she often sang at her work, because of its quaint, monotonous melody :

'" Attend thee, go play thee,
Sweet love, I am busie,
My silk and twist is not yet spun :
My Ladie will blame me
If that she send for me
And find that my work be undun.
How then ?
How shall I be set me ?
To say love did let me ?
Fie no, 'twill not fit me ;
It were no 'scuse for me.' "

There were several verses. She was murmuring :

" ' The frost bites faire flowers ;
Let's work in due howres ;
Haste, haste and be merie,
Till our needles be werie,' "

when Verily put her head in at the door.

" Mistress, your dinner is waiting," she announced, adding, in a tone of pious fervour : " The Lord be thanked, Honeysweet ! Master Kit Swithun hath no great appetite. He did but eat the half of that I set before him."

CHAPTER IV

"I lothe to tel the peevish brawles
And fond delights of Cupid's thrawles.
Like momish mates of Midas mood
They gape to get that doth no good.
Now down, now vp, as tapsters vse to tosse ye cup.
One breedeth ioy, another breeds us great annoy."
A Warning to Wooers.

THE Gardener worked all day with right good will, cutting down and tearing away the rotting wood and greedy suckers, the clinging bryony, bramble, and other binding weeds, that had overcome all fair fruits of the garden. In a corner of the herbary he stacked a great bonfire, upon which he threw load upon load of the rubbish he thus collected. A young man of some muscle and much energy, manual toil was agreeable to him, and he rolled up the century-old wheelbarrow, unearthed from dust and cobwebs, to bring fuel to his fire, covering himself with honest sweat and wholesome grime quite joyously. For what man or boy does not love a bonfire? There is something in the very smell of the burning wood-stuff, in the crackle of branch and leaf, that is sweet to the masculine senses, and humanity at large ever delights in the sight of smoke and flame mounting upwards, as much now as in the old young days of pagan sacrifice. Swithun offered a holocaust to the God of Gardens with all his heart, and after two hours of labour had a merry fire blazing. He was wheeling up a fresh load towards

it when he saw, waiting for him, on the wind side, the stout and comely form of Verily, in a clean mob cap and apron, with her hair smoothly braided, and a look of demure self-complacency on her round face.

"You appear to be making good way with the weeds, Master Swithun," she observed graciously. "It is a pity we did not engage your services sooner."

Swithun stretched himself, and wiped his brow with a red cotton handkerchief, but made no reply, save by a smile, and Verily continued:

"It must be warm work, and the day so mild. Have you been used to such hard labour, Swithun? An I had not, but just now, put on my best flowered afternoon gown, I would willingly lend you of my aid, for I see that you have more than enow for one man to do. But it is my duty to keep neat and tidy withal, lest I be wanted to wait on the Master."

She looked down upon and stroked the folds of her dress as she spoke. It had purple sprigs on a brown ground, and belonged to another age. Swithun glanced at it as he flung a heap of twitch on the fire.

"It would be a pity to spoil such a becoming gown," he said gravely, "and it is certainly a maid's duty always to be neat and tidy."

She bridled. "Ah, I see that you know what's seemly, Master Swithun. But as for being a maid—well, we cannot all be wived, as thou'rt aware; but the time may come when—la! I was nigh saying things."

She simpered, coughed, and tried to blush, not entirely without success, hoping thereby to stimulate a question. But Swithun was far too absorbed in his bonfire to feel any interest in her revelations. He took up his wheelbarrow and marched off with it to

the place where he was working, returning presently with another load of dry stalks and long brittle tendrils. As they spluttered jovially in the blaze, Verily heaved an ostentatious sigh, and coughed again timorously.

"I suppose," she hazarded, in a voice intended to be full of airy indifference, "you will not have been near the Chough and Crow to-day, Swithun?"

"That I was," he answered, dragging out a mass of Enchanter's Nightshade, "for I went up after lun—dinner to fetch some tools, finding those here not quite in working order. A passing cart gave me a lift."

"Ah!" She paused. "And may I ask—did ye chance to see anyone there—any stranger?"

"All in these parts are strangers to me, ma'am," he averred.

"But did ye not notice a gentleman from foreign parts," she pursued eagerly; at least—that is to say—with a sun-browned skin and a masterful manner?"

"Had he a beard?" asked Swithun thoughtfully, resting a moment from his labours, and averting his face slightly.

"I know not. But Gapper, the postman, did tell me that such a gentleman was there yester-eve. He came in a coach, and was spending the night there."

"Now you come to speak of it," said Swithun, "I did see such a stranger there overnight, but he went this morning. I fancy he was but passing through."

His mouth twitched in the effort to control a smile. Did he not know that bearded stranger, and was not that same beard reposing at this moment in the disused coach-house under the chamber allotted to him, in company with certain other articles he had thought well to safeguard? They were skilfully packed in the

boot of the old coach, which had long been home to many families of mice, moth, and spider, and he chuckled inwardly to think how unlikely it was that the sunbrowned stranger with the masterful manner would ever again be seen at the Chough and Crow.

Verily, but too accustomed to such disappointments, merely sighed once more, but this time with such aggressive inference that Swithun became at last conscious of the query expected of him, and he put it.

"You seem interested in the stranger, ma'am. May I ask—was he likely to be any friend of yours?"

Verily pursed up her mouth and looked mysterious for a moment. Then she decided to keep the Gardener no longer in the dark.

"More than a friend, Swithun," she sighed. "I had hoped the stranger might have been one only too well known to me. But an thou say'st he was just passing through the village, the signs of Nature must be false, and the foreshadowing of a woman's fond heart again deceived."

Swithun kept his face still serious.

"And may I ask what are the signs of Nature?" he inquired. "Are they difficult to read?"

"Lord bless you! No, young man; they are as easy as pie. Any fool can read 'em. For instance, my kitchen fire burnt up wonderful bright and easy this morning, which is a sure and certain sign of a faithful lover. Then I saw, at sunrise, one jackdaw in the Court-yard; and last night, when I was out a-walking, did I see three lambs wi' their faces my way. Could aught be luckier? And the night before last I beheld the new moon all i' the open, not through glass, as betokens misfortune; while, to crown all, this very morning I chanced to put on my left stock-

ing wrong side out, which, as every maid knows, is a sure token she will see her sweetheart before the week is over."

"You seem to be in luck's way, ma'am," said Swithun, stooping to fork up his fire. "And I wish the last portent may quickly come true."

"Thank ye, Swithun. No doubt ye've known the pangs of love yourself. As the song says: 'When Cupid with his deadly dart doth wound the heart full sore.' And so is mine, in good sooth." She sighed again. "Still, we would not be without such pleasing pain, Gardener, would we?"

"Certainly not," replied Swithun promptly, taking up the handles of his wheelbarrow. "You know what the poet said:

> "'Tis better to have loved and lost,
> Than never to have loved at all.'"

He wheeled off rapidly, glad to turn his face from her and relax the muscles he had kept severely grave. She turned over his last words in her mind, and found them very delectable.

> "'Tis better to have loved and lost,
> Than never had no love at all,'"

she muttered. "True, indeed; I never heard better poetry, nor more to the point."

She went indoors pensively, repeating the lines to herself as she went.

"I find the new Gardener a very sensible young man, and learned in the poets," she said to Melisent, thereupon repeating her version of the words she had just committed to memory.

Melisent smiled. She had no acquaintance with

Tennyson : he was of too late a time ; but she had seen and heard the quotation somewhere.

"Moreover," added Verily, in a tone of triumph, "from that he said I make sure Swithun, too, hath loved and lost, Honeysweet. For he did confide in me that he would not be without such pleasing pain."

"You should not bewray his confidence, Verily," said Melisent, with affected severity, as she swiftly moved her jewelled bobbins.

"Me bewray confidence!" cried the serving-maid indignantly, shocked at the aspersion. "Why, Honeysweet, wild horses would not tear it from me! When he tells me the name of she who doth command his heart, I shall hold it sacred as—as mine own love. And right glad am I that his heart is 'gaged elsewhere, mine being vowed to Jehoram, for I would not have another pine in unrequited love. But, see—look at Pearl! He washeth over his left ear—sure sign and token a stranger cometh! It is truly wonderful how the animals know these things. My Aunt Keziah's cat did——"

"But Pearl is my cat, and therefore it must be someone who cometh to visit me, not thee, Verily," said Melisent, with a twinkle in her eyes.

Verily mused. This reasoning seemed valid.

"And if it was, who should rejoice more than me, Mistress?" she said. "I would almost as lief see thy sweetheart come as mine own."

"But as I have no sweetheart, thou'rt scarce likely to see him," observed Melisent, pursing up her pretty mouth.

"All in good time, Sweet. He will come sure enough. Perhaps it is even he that Pearl foretells.

Who knows? As I said before, my Aunt Keziah's cat——"

But the story of Aunt Keziah's cat was not destined to be told that day, for the Library gong sounded just then, and Verily hurried to respond to it. She returned in a few minutes.

"The Master's compliments to you, Mistress, and will you do him the honour to have a bout with him, as he feeleth the need of exercise," she said. It was a usual formula.

Melisent laid down her cushion, and rose. "Another interruption! I wend on slowly," she complained; but her regret was mixed with gladness, for her young blood wearied of much sitting. The work was tedious, the light waned, and she loved fencing. In a very short time she had attired herself in a loose shirt and short skirt, to face her father in the great central hall, masked, gloved, and armed. Behind her was the carved oak screen, from either side of which the staircase rose, and on her right the vast open fireplace, decorated with much moulding, and surrounded by a dark oil-painting whose subject had long been obscured. The walls were hung with mouldering antlers and rusty weapons of war, while a suit of equally rusty armour stood hard by, like a knightly umpire, sending forth faint echoes of approval as the foils clashed.

Melisent was nearly a match for her father, but not quite. Nor did she desire to be, well knowing he would dislike to be beaten.

They saluted, putting themselves in the time-honoured pose—left hand raised, knees well bent, foils crossed—and then went at each other gaily: attack and parry, thrust, quarte and tierce, flanconnade and riposte, feint, cut-over and beat, doubling and

time thrust, skilful defence to sudden assault—all the motions of this enchanting game, each crying out the other's successes, advancing, retiring, springing on the uneven stone floor, bending, twisting, and lunging, then recovering to the 'on guard' position an instant after in exquisite poise—head thrown back, left arm uplifted, right foot forward, and the whole body alert with quivering, watchful eagerness. Lithe and quick as cats, they breathed hard, but showed no signs of fatigue for a long time; till Mr. de Paganel cried a halt, and Melisent, taking off her mask and gloves, threw herself on the high-backed bench by the empty fireplace.

"You are too strong for me, sir," she cried to her father.

"Nay, 'tis but a little more skill needed," he replied, well pleased. "Thy youth is full a match for my age, and I am quite breathed, child. Verily! Where is the damsel? I desire a cup of clary. Tell her to bring it to me in the Library."

He went away, and Melisent ran towards the kitchen to find Verily; whereby she nearly fell into the arms of one who stood in the deep shadow of the carven screen.

"Forgive me, madam. It was Verily said I might stand here to watch the fencing and take any orders from the Master," said Swithun, for it was he. His eyes rested upon her with admiration.

The girl instinctively put up both hands to her ruffled hair and warm cheeks.

"Oh, but Verily should not. My father would be angry. Where is she? Doth she cook our supper?"

"She told me she was but just going into the Herb Garden to get some rosemary, maybe for a sauce."

A smile curved Melisent's lips. She shook her head.

"Rosemary is not used for sauces, Swithun. I'll warrant Verily seeks it for a better reason—to make a plaster against melancholy, mayhap. She did so but last week, and bound it on her right arm."

"I hope with good effect," said Swithun.

"So she saith. After two hours of wearing it the heart becometh wondrous light, and all trouble of mind fleeth."

They smiled at each other.

"If it has, indeed, such magic, there need be no more sore hearts nor harassed minds," observed the young man. "I must ask Verily to make me a plaster next time I have an attack of melancholy."

"Poor Verily! She hath not cured herself yet, I fear," said Melisent tenderly. "She frets always for a lover who hath not returned to her."

"Poor Verily!" echoed the Gardener, for truly he felt very sympathetic at that moment. And he found himself wondering vaguely how much the maiden before him knew of love.

They still stood by the screen in the gathering gloom, and were alone, save for the dim knightly figure that caught the last faint stream of twilight from the high window. Melisent felt some hint of the question in Swithun's mind, and, becoming suddenly embarrassed, asked:

"Hast ever watched fencing before?"

"Often. And never have I seen a swifter attack than that last one of yours by the circle and disengagement," he answered. "It was prettily done indeed."

Her eyes opened wide.

"You fence?" she queried.

He bit his lip. "No, madam; but, as I said, I

have seen gentlemen fence, and heard them talk of it."

"Wilt take a foil with me one day, to try your skill?" she said; and then added hastily: "But no; I forgot. 'Twould maybe displease my father."

"And rightly. It is no sport for gardening men, and would be far too great an honour for me," quoth Swithun.

She looked at him, perplexed.

"In faith, I do not think . . . I may not believe," she stammered.

The gong boomed lustily from the Library, and its growl had an angry ring. Melisent knew that her father was growing impatient for his wine.

"I must go," she exclaimed hurriedly. "But after supper, in the Dame's Parlour—Verily will show the way—I will be there."

She darted past him into the dining-hall, where, upon a sideboard, stood quaintly fashioned goblets and a lidded flagon of wine. These she set upon a tray, and was for going across the hall with it.

"You must not do that," exclaimed Swithun, springing forward and taking the tray from her hands by gentle force. He had never thought to make himself serving-man to Paganel of Paganel Garth, but there he was, waiting at his elbow, like a flunkey!

Godwin de Paganel looked surprised.

"'Tis the new Gardener, my father," explained Melisent, with a vivid blush.

"Good e'en to you, my man. I will drink to your success with the garden," said her father pleasantly, pouring out his clary. It was no surprise to have the Gardener wait upon him, but a matter of course in his eyes. "Hast been long in service?" he asked.

"All my life, sir, have I served one master or another," was the answer.

De Paganel gave him a glance of quick scrutiny. Where had he heard that voice before? Then he dismissed Gardener and daughter alike from his mind, and turned his whole attention to the wine.

"Verily must fetch up another bottle to-night, my child," he observed, "for, by my faith, this wine hath gone extremely flat."

Outside the door Melisent turned to Swithun, and said softly:

"I thank you for carrying the wine, Kit Swithun, but I would not have it so again. It is not a service required of the Gardener."

"Any service that I can do for you, madam, is to my honour and pleasure," he said gravely. "Command me when you will."

She gave him a fleeting smile, and vanished into the dark hall, taking all the light with her.

CHAPTER V

"As bright as doth the morning starre appear
Out of the east, with flaming locks bedight
To tell that dawning day is drawing neare,
And to the world does bring long-wishèd light;
So fair and fresh that ladye showed her selfe in sight."
Faerie Queene, Canto XII., St. 2.

THE lady that stepped into the dimly lighted Dame's Parlour that night after supper seemed to Swithun a being vastly different from the one he had so lately seen fencing in the twilit hall. For Melisent had clothed herself in the fashion of a time long past, and wore a yellowish-white robe of soft taffetas, embroidered about the hem with green leaves, and confined under the bosom with a green girdle. A gauzy scarf covered her bare shoulders, and her arms, from their short puffed sleeves, were encased in long silken mittens. She had knotted her dark hair high above her head, showing to perfection the exquisite nape of her neck, white as milk against a string of garnets that encircled it, and she dawned on the eye of the dazzled Gardener as a fair and dainty vision of the age that gave us Pamelas and Amandas. He smiled at the thought of her girlish vanity, little imagining that Melisent, in thus attiring herself, had but followed principles of economy and her father's pleasure. He liked best to see her in the short-waisted gown of a Georgian ancestress, in the clinging, hoopless skirt that showed off so well the lines of her budding figure.

And how was Swithun to know that she had bought no clothing but flannel and shoes for the past five years, since she had discovered the treasures of the wardrobe chamber?

He rose as she entered, and she bade him be seated. In her arms were books—old books with leathern covers, giving out a musty odour as they passed.

"At this hour," she said, "my father always rests awhile after his evening meal. Soon he will want me to play piquet with him till my bedtime. We play every night. Dost know the game?"

"No, madam," lied Swithun gravely, remembering in time that a Gardener may not know the games of gentlemen.

"I do not like cards at all," observed Melisent, with a little pout, "and piquet least of all, for it is unjust. It gives to the elder hand all advantages, and none to the younger; heaps fortune on the fortunate, and takes from the unfortunate."

"But that is only a law of life," said Swithun, "and has been endorsed by Holy Writ. Do you not remember—'to him that hath, shall be given'?"

Her black brows were drawn together as she mused over these words.

"I think that doth not signify things of the flesh, but of the spirit," she said presently. "God would not be unjust."

"Still, He permits Nature to be so, and the world also," said Swithun, watching her. "For both give most to those who already have."

"Why, then, have we a sense of justice?" demanded Melisent, after another thoughtful pause.

"You ask me a question that has puzzled wiser heads than mine, and wrecked religions," said Swithun,

smiling. "Our sense of justice in an apparently unjust scheme of things is a perplexing incongruity. We must hope in a larger justice than we can yet comprehend. But——"

"And you say you have no learning!" she interrupted, as he hesitated for a moment. "You do not know the wisdom of the ages, nor the language in which all our books have been writ until but a few centuries ago!" Incredulity was in her voice.

"I am hoping to learn much from you, madam," he replied, shifting his eyes shamefacedly.

"I misdoubt if I can teach you anything," she faltered. He grew bold again.

"Indeed you can, if you will, madam," he said earnestly. "But I am afraid you repent our bargain."

"No, no!" she protested.

"Then, before I begin to study the wisdom of the ages, will you tell me something of a matter upon which I am curious? May I learn the history of this ancient house, and what it is that gives to it a certain mystery and strangeness? You know, the village folk say that Paganel Garth is haunted."

"And that is true," said Melisent, with a deepening in her blue eyes, as they grew dreamy and seemed to look far away.

"You have seen——"

"Shadows—nothing more. But I have heard—and felt."

"Yes?" He leaned forward eagerly.

"Oh, I know not! In faith, I have lived so much alone, dreamed so much, thought so much, fancied so much, that I cannot tell whether the dim forms mine eyes have seen and the sounds mine ears have heard

be true sights and sounds, or whether my mind hath cast them, like shadows, on the air about me."

It was plain to him that she strove with an inborn love of truth against a credulity fostered by her solitary life in a place given over to superstition.

"But you believe that spirits of the dead may return to visit the earth," he said. "It would never truly surprise you to see your ancestor, Ansculf de Paganel, walking in the Dragon's Court, or about the corridors of this silent house at nightfall?"

"Why should it?" she asked. "Do not all the books tell us of such visitations, even the Holy Book?"

"And would you not be afraid to meet one risen from the dead?" he probed.

She hesitated. "I think . . . it would depend. I should fear evil spirits. But here we have none, save my good forefather, Ansculf de Paganel, and I know he doth bode us well."

"How do you know?" he queried. She looked distressed.

"Because—because—oh, it is well known to us that Ansculf de Paganel was a good man, wronged by his time, and that he did carry his wrongs, with his Secret, to the grave."

"Once more you speak of a secret," said Swithun. "Does it, then, belong to the Alchemist as well as to the Dragon? And what *is* the Secret?"

Melisent drew herself up suddenly, and her eyes flashed softly.

"I do not think it is for strangers to ask so many questions, or seek to know what concerneth the de Paganels alone," she said proudly. "And I will beg you not to call my forebear 'the Alchemist.' It was a title given unto him by his enemies."

"I ask a thousand pardons," exclaimed Swithun, springing up. "Forgive me, lady. I have been rude and presumptuous, and rightly angered you. I had better rid you of my company."

His humility, as he stood with bent head before her, touched her womanliness. She veered.

"If you will never speak to others of what I tell you——" she began.

"Madam! Am I a dishonourable knave?" he cried.

"I do believe thou art a true man, Kit Swithun, and I trust thee," she said, opening out once more, like a lovely flower, and dropping into the more familiar mode of speech he was learning to listen for; "so sit ye down again, and I will tell thee all I know. 'Tis not much. Only that there be papers in our family wherein the Secret is told of, though naught hath been made plain or fully writ down. There doth seem, truly, to be something missing, something hid from us. And I do think the Dragon knoweth what it is."

As her last words died away, the air of the silent room seemed to become charged with mystery and vague enchantment. The faint outlines of the dancing Hours and armoured Knights in the arras appeared to move gently amid the shadows cast upon them by lamp and flickering firewood, while the rare beauty of Melisent and the tremulous music of her voice united with his own bodily weariness to give Swithun a curious sensation of unreality, to make the moment like one of those youthful trances from which the dreamer ever awakes with longings unfulfilled. He feared to breathe lest he should disturb the spell upon his senses, and Melisent also became strangely still, as if all animation were suspended in her. They

remained thus entranced for some long-drawn minutes; then she drew a long breath, bringing with it a wave of lovely colour to her face.

"Did I not speak truly?" she exclaimed; "and is not this parlour haunted by kindly ghosts? Did you not feel the touch of their hands, like soft, cool air, and hear the sound of their far-away voices? If not, it is because ye are a stranger, and the spirits of this place dare not make their presence known to you. But I do waste too much time on foolish talk, and my father will soon be calling me. Take this book and read it now. It will show thee how Latin is made. Then the declensions must be learnt. 'Twill not take long. Begin here."

With an effort at clumsy pronunciation Swithun started to read aloud from the old Latin Grammar she had placed in his hands. Its long-tailed ss helped him, and he treated them all as fs. Melisent laughed gaily.

"Why, Kit Swithun, I must first teach thee English!" she cried.

"But this is so old," he complained.

"Old! It hath barely a century upon it. Wait till I set thee to read the imprints of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde!"

"I should like to try now," he declared; and after a momentary hesitation she sought out a book from a small pile on the window-seat, and placed it before him.

It was in black-letter, and the title-page told that it was *The Shyp of Folys*, "translated out of Latin, French and Doche by Alexander Barclay 1509"—a book not easy to read even by a scholar.

Swithun stared at it with well-feigned amazement, shook his head, and handed it back to her.

"This is never English; no one could read it," he answered, setting a trap with cunning. She fell into it.

"In sooth, I can read it with ease," she asseverated eagerly; and then began:

> "'Who that wyll suffer his owne hous to burn,
> Tyll nought of it ſave the bare wallys stoude,
> And with hiss water haſtely doth ren,
> To quench the fyre of anothers hous or londe;
> He is a fole and haue ſhall in his hande
> A folyſſhe Pype or horne therwith to blowe——'"

The sweet voice rose and fell in tender cadences; the air again was filled with enchantment. Swithun leaned his elbow on the oaken table, his chin upon his hand, and went back into his trance.

CHAPTER VI

" When daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight.
* * * * *
" When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,
When turtles pair, and rooks and daws,
And fields are scattered o'er with flocks."

Love's Labour's Lost.

THREE weeks passed, and during that time Melisent had the great joy of seeing Swithun dib potatoes. She watched all processes with the keenest interest: the preparing of the earth, its refreshment by means of some magical fertilizer which the gardener told her had been sent him as a sample, and, finally, the dibbing, when each potato or part of a potato was laid in its little earth-bed, there to root happily and produce its kind. Swithun had come by them cheaply, he said, having exchanged a sackful of old iron he had found about the place for a sackful of potatoes. Melisent marvelled at his cleverness in thinking of such an exchange, and together they rejoiced over this fresh version of 'new lamps for old.' In fancy she saw her potatoes, a large and lovely crop, providing for her dinner-table through summer and winter, and enough over for next year's dibbing. How she longed to see their first green leaf appear above the well-coaxed earth!

Other things did Swithun set also—cabbage and carrot and turnip seed, onion and beet, radish and lettuce, peas and beans and cauliflowers. Every day he wrenched a plat of ground from the cruel embrace of binding weeds, and next day dug into it some of his magic fertilizer. Magic, indeed, it seemed, for the small amount he had first shown Melisent was as if inexhaustible! The seeds cost little, too, he said. He was able to get them cheaply from a florist he knew, and she was surprised at the smallness of the outlay. It was good to reflect, too, that next year even such outlay would be spared, as they would keep their own seed. What a pleasure, she thought, to grow from one's own seed!

She helped in the sowing and in making the beds tidy; would have joined in the digging had the Gardener permitted, but that he firmly refused. He would but allow her to wield the rake, to peg down the strings for level lines, to run for him, to fetch this or that as he needed it. And it was all a delight to Melisent. For what affords a greater joy to the natural and unspoilt heart than aiding Mother Earth in her marvellous feats of witchery? Here you give her a tiny seed, no bigger than a pin's head, and lo! by-and-by up comes a precious little point of green, to grow and swell into a great white-breasted cabbage, or a gloriously tinted beetroot. The fascination of it is supreme, and we do not wonder that 'God Almighty first planted a garden.'

And then the time when seeds are sown, the babyhood of the year, with al its childish joy and mirth, is so wondrously seductive. The rapture of birds in trees, all snow-blossom; the gay call of the cuckoo; the laughing skies, with their playful little showers

and naughty tempers of hail; the murmuring of bees about the scented cherry-branches; the sweet airs that bring upon their invisible wings renewed hope and youth—all these lovable things attend the sowing season, like good fairies at the christening of the Princess in the old tales.

There are bad fairies, too, creepy and crawly, slimy and destructive; but who thinks of them on April mornings, when the thrush flutes in the budding hawthorn by his new-built nest, and 'merry larks are ploughmen's clocks'? Who cares if the dappled dainty butterfly be parent to devouring grubs, or if the flood of exquisite song pealing from the blackbird's trembling throat will be paid for in ripe cherries? Such matters do not trouble us in the sweet o' the year. We simply inhale all the beauty, fragrance, music, and are glad.

The Gardener worked as well at his Latin and French as at his gardening, and made excellent progress. He learnt also to read the old English that Melisent read so easily and loved so well, thus sharing with her, in the evening hours they spent together, those treasures of the past the ancient Library afforded. When twilight fell, and he could no longer see to hew and dig and sow, she would call him into the Dame's Parlour, there to be occupied with books, or in assisting her with the loom, which greatly interested him. It was hard for her to work it alone, and the tapestry grew much faster under their joint efforts.

Often Verily sat with them, and gave practical advice, always bearing in mind the Gardener's menial position, and reminding him of it when she considered such reminder necessary. Since her last disappointment she had worn a chastened expression on her rosy

face, and sighed more frequently even than before. But a Verily without sighs would have been strange to Melisent, who now scarcely noted them.

She had ceased to perplex herself about Swithun, or to speculate upon the difference she recognized between him and the ordinary labouring man of the village, with whom, indeed, she was but slightly acquainted. Accepting his account of himself, she thanked God for having sent such a vastly superior gardener to her need, and required no further reason for his coming. She was happier than ever before in her short life.

But nothing remains stationary in the universe, and change was making swift strides towards her peace.

It arrived one night, and Verily foretold it.

They were in the Dame's Parlour—Melisent, Verily, and Swithun. It was a cold evening, and Verily had lighted a fire on the hearth. Melisent and Swithun had been working at the loom, but had halted to look for some instruction in the Book of Tapestry, when Verily observed, in a surprisingly cheerful voice :

" I knew there was a stranger coming."

The young man and girl looked up from their book, startled.

" A stranger ! Where is he ?" asked Swithun, glancing at the window.

" He hath not yet come, but he cometh," protested Verily. " My left eyebrow hath been itching all the even, and now—see—there is a black on the fire-dog, two sure and certain signs of a stranger."

" It is to be hoped not, Verily !" exclaimed Melisent.

" Speak for yourself, Mistress," said the maid ; " and I do call it most unfeeling of ye to wish him away, when it may be one . . . one who hath been long expected."

Melisent had barely time to excuse herself for lack of sympathy when the gong rang from the Library, and Verily answered it, to return with the formula :

"The Master's compliments, and will Mistress Melisent do him the honour——"

"To fence with him? Oh no, Verily; I cannot to-night. I am too weary. I fain would rest," Melisent pouted.

Verily's astonished eyebrows rose in still higher astonishment. It was the first time she had received such an answer.

"Tell my father"—the girl began, struggled with herself and went on—"I shall be most happy to take a foil against him, and will be with him anon. He hath so little amusement," she added to Swithun as Verily sped. "I would not be selfish."

"But you are very tired; you worked too long in the garden this afternoon," he replied. "Let me go and explain to the master."

She shook her head. "No; 'twould vex him, and 'tis my duty. But do you look out the thing we require in my absence. I may not be long."

She joined her father in the hall with no show of fatigue, alert and ready for action. But before they had exchanged many passes there came an unwonted sound to interrupt them. The loud clanging bell of the outer gate crashed upon their tensely strung nerves and startled them to a sudden pause.

"Son of Mary! Who comes now?" cried de Paganel, in amaze.

A long silence, however, reassured them both.

"Some passing traveller to learn the way, or maybe a pedlar," suggested Melisent.

"Have at you!" cried her father, and they began again in earnest.

CHAPTER VII

" I waile in wo, I plunge in pain,
With sorrowing sobs I do complain,
With wallowing waues I wish to die,
I languish sore whereas I lie,
In feare I faint, in hope I holde,
With ruthe I runne, I was too bolde :
As lucklesse lot assigned me
In dangerous dale of destinie :
Hope bids me smile, Feare bids me weep,
My seelie soule thus Care doth keep."

A sorrowfull Sonet, made by M. George Mannington at Cambridge Castle.

THE clanging of the rusty bell threw Verily into a state of much perturbation. She peered from a window upstairs, and, beholding the sight for which her eyes had waited many a long day, made sure that her auguries were fulfilled at last. For there by the gate stood a manly form, and behind him on the road was the one carriage of the village inn—a springless, rocky brougham of early Victorian date, drawn by a scraggy white horse who also had seen better days.

" It is him !" she murmured with ecstasy, straining her eyes to catch the features of the visitor, half hidden by the iron scroll-work of the gate. " Him, sure enough. His height to an inch, and just his masterful way o' ringing, as if the whole place belonged to him. And he must ha' made a heap o' money to come in a coach, though I always thought he would. Oh, Jehoram, Jehoram ! Can it be true that thou hast

come back to the arms of thy faithful and loving Verily ?"

She slipped into her bed-chamber and arranged her loose hair in a seemly manner under the starched frill of her cap. It was a becoming cap, albeit of past date, and Verily, having worn the like since girlhood, saw nothing absurd in it. She prinked and postured a few minutes before the greenish glass, that cast back such a poor reflection of her ruddy face in the twilight, and a satisfied smile lit up her rounded features. For in truth she was comely, and had borne the burden of years well, although Time had robbed her of some grace.

Her fingers trembled as she unbolted the gate.

"Is Mr. de Paganel at home ?" the Stranger asked, in a voice and accent unfamiliar. But Verily, full of unbounded hope and assurance, was not to be easily discouraged.

"Oh, Jehoram, thou hast come at last !" she exclaimed, holding forth her two arms as if to take him to her bosom.

The Stranger stepped back a pace in alarm. The action put him out of the shadow of the gate, and showed his features plainly in the light from the western sky. Verily gave a sharp cry of bitter disappointment, and recovered herself quickly.

"I crave your pardon, sir, but I mistook." She choked and swallowed hastily. "What was it that your honour was pleased to say ?"

"Is Mr. de Paganel at home ?" he said. "If so, I wish to see him at once, on a matter of great importance."

"The Master never admits strangers to his presence, sir," she faltered, "and I fear me 'twill but vex him

to be disturbed at this hour. If your honour will give a name, I——"

"He will see *me*," the Stranger interrupted, with emphasis. "Be good enough to take me to him at once."

His air of certitude and command quenched Verily, already crushed and drooping.

"Wilt please to step in, sir," she said meekly, and bolted the gate behind him with great care. This done, she led the way across the Court-yard to the steps and up through the mighty nail-studded door, which she also locked and barred, as against a regiment of invaders. Thereupon she guided him by tortuous stone passages to a long, low room, hung with faded silk arras and furnished with out-worn splendour, once an elegant withdrawing-room, but long since discarded and left to decay. The leaded panes of its several windows were of old discoloured glass, and now, being cracked and dirty, gave hardly any light at all. A powerful odour of rotting wood, damp mouldiness and mice filled the air; curtains and arras were dropping to pieces; cobwebs were hanging in all the corners, and the whole chamber exhaled that melancholy air of neglected age and forgotten past which strikes a chill to the heart. Here Verily bade the Stranger be seated, and left him abruptly, without so much as asking his name or taking the card he held out.

For she was almost distraught, poor Verily, having reached the limit of her powers, and she could no longer restrain the emotion that struggled for mastery in her lacerated breast. As soon as she had closed the door of the withdrawing-room on the Stranger, she ran weeping to her room, there to indulge the full measure of her grief.

"Will he never come?" she wailed, "and am I ever to be the sport of cruel fate? Why hath every omen pointed to his coming these many days, and my poor heart deceived me so? Never will I believe in anything again. Alack! alack! never was a maid more ill-used. My heart is broke now, sure enough. Fain would I lay me down and die since all my hopes are blighted."

While her piteous grief thus overflowed, the Stranger was pacing up and down the long withdrawing-room, chafing at the non-appearance of the Master of the house, and also against an unpleasant sensation of frost in his blood, which he could not dispel. He had been all day collecting weird stories about this old mansion and its inhabitants, past and present, legends that caused him now a queer tightening of the skin and curdling sensation of some vague thing to be dreaded. The evening shadows had deepened till the chamber was nearly in total darkness, and the rattle of mice behind the woodwork troubled his nerves. When he saw the arras move, in a slight draught from one of the broken window-panes, the roots of his hair seemed to stiffen.

"A gruesome place, indeed," he thought, "and the sooner it is cleared off the face of the earth, the better. What is the sense of preserving such mouldy old heaps of dust and vermin, accumulations of moth, rust, and superstition? It is amazing how people can effuse as they do over the beauty and glamour of the past, or pay the prices they do for worm-eaten and moth-eaten antiquities. There are fools everywhere ready to spend fortunes on the insanitary rubbish of a bygone age. But, truly, it is by fools wise men flourish."

His lips curved in a smile that was not quite pleasant. He had a loose mouth, partly concealed by a curled black moustache, with a slight hang of the underlip and a narrow jaw, terminating in a heavy chin. His nose was somewhat thick, and the top part of his face went back a long way into coarse dark hair, cropped so closely as to show but little its tendency to crisp curling. His head was long, and bulged at the back near the neck. Under full lids and level brows were sombre eyes, whose Oriental length and beauty were marred by their shifty and furtive glances, their lack of a direct and candid gaze. He was tall, but not well-knit; handsome, but not distinguished. The only thing compelling about him was his softly persuasive voice, whose inflections had a strangely magnetic charm. He muttered to himself now, as he continued to pace the room, stopping here and there to examine the old gilded furniture, with its quaintly bowed legs, its painted tables and cabinets, its treasures of ormolu and marquetry.

"It is worth coming for, anyhow, even if I get no farther than this room, which should be a pretty fair sample of the whole interior. For there's value here, quite apart from legend and mystery. One can't go far wrong, I should say. And if I can only get into the Library I shall have a better grip of possibilities. It isn't going to be child's play, though, this business. A false move will shut us down for good. If the she-servant hadn't taken me for someone else, the probability is I should even now be standing on the wrong side of the gate. It was lucky I took her in a soft moment. A tabby with claws, no doubt. These old servants are the devil to pass; they're so deucedly suspicious. But here I am, within the citadel, and

I could explore it without leave, only it might precipitate matters and spoil the music. Ah!"

He stopped and shuddered at a slight creaking sound, as if a chair had been moved behind him. "How long am I to remain in this accursed place alone, I wonder?" he said aloud, and his voice in the dead stillness sounded so unreal that it added to his nervous terrors. "I shall be seeing things next," he muttered. "Damned if I stay here another moment!"

He strode to the door, and found himself in a corridor even darker than the room he had quitted. For some minutes he groped blindly, bumping his head under low arches, and cursing softly by the way. At last he heard sounds, and held his breath to listen; curious sounds, that at first gave his blood a fresh stir of dread. For what he heard was the clash of metal, like armed men fighting. Surely a vastly queer noise to hear in a house occupied solely by a scholar and two women, as he had been told! But then came voices and a ringing laugh that reassured him. He breathed again, and, turning down another narrow passage, laid his hand on the high latch of a door.

For a moment he paused. A haunting distrust again assailed him. What was he going to see? What did the clash of arms signify in that ancient house? Could there really be duelling there, in the dusk? He would not permit himself to give form to the doubts that rose in his mind, a mind not imaginative but with some inherited mysticism latent in it. And, if there were duelling, between whom—the dead or the living? He was in a state to suffer little surprise had he come upon two skeletons in armour crossing ghostly blades in a blue and misty light.

But his twentieth-century materialism came to his

aid, and he smiled with disdain at his own weakness as he pushed open the door. Then all doubts and fears vanished before a strange but very charming spectacle.

In the fading light stood a girl, in a loose jacket and short quilted petticoat, facing a man in knee-breeches and embroidered shirt, and making rapid play with a foil against him. Although masked, the poise of her head and outline of her face suggested beauty, while her grace of body and lithe movements told unmistakably of her youth. The very human breathing of the two, the pad-pad of their footfalls on the stone floor, showed these two figures to be conclusively mortal, and dispelled all vague fears; but the stranger was nevertheless strangely perplexed by their appearance, and felt as though he had somehow stepped back into a past century.

Suddenly the girl cried, "Flancon!" and for a few seconds there seemed a deadlock of blades. Then her adversary cried a halt.

"'Tis too dark," he said. "I see nothing till I feel thy foil against mine own. We must begin earlier another eve."

These words gave the listener a fresh qualm of mystery. Where had he heard such speech? Were they rehearsing a scene in an old comedy?

"True. 'Tis all chance in this owl-light, I do confess. But I was nigh the victory, dear sir, was I not?" said a laughing girl-voice.

"Thou hast cat's eyes, Ladybird. But to be beaten by thee were no shame. Even a young fencer might well deem it an honour."

The girl laughed again, but with a slight note of regret in her mirth.

"I am not like to do any young fencer the honour, dear father, seeing that no one ever comes here who can wield the foils," she said.

"Patience, child. Thou'rt young enough yet. Never fear but that the Fairy Prince will come one day to awaken the Sleeping Beauty. He always frees the imprisoned maiden sooner or later."

"May it be sooner!" ejaculated Melisent, as she turned to hang up her foil and mask.

It was then that her eyes met those of the Stranger, who stood in the shadow by the armoured figure. She uttered a sharp cry, and reeled slightly.

"Forgive me," he said, stepping forward and bowing low. "I have been standing here some few minutes to watch the fencing, and did not like to interrupt. I must plead a most shocking breach of ceremony in coming here unasked, but your servant put me into a dark room and left me there so long that I grew nervous, and made my way out to human company, having had enough of ghosts. Though, indeed, I thought at first you were two spirits from another world, fighting a fleshless duel upon some ancient feud.''

Melisent liked ill this jesting about the family ghosts, and her father frowned deeply.

"May I ask, sir, to what I owe the honour of your visit?" he demanded with some asperity. "We are not used to receive visitors at any time of the day, least of all at this hour; and, in admitting one, the serving-maid hath disobeyed my express command."

"Sir, I take upon myself the entire blame of my presence here," was the answer. Your servant did her best to keep me outside the gates, but I would

not be kept out. I felt sure of your forgiveness, and still more sure of your courtesy, could I but see you and explain why I am come, especially as I am armed with a letter of introduction from one who expresses great esteem for you, and claims to be one of your oldest friends—Lord Darchester."

Godwin de Paganel appeared but slightly mollified.

"'Tis true that the Darchester family and ours have been ever on terms of friendship," he said; "but I have lost sight of the Earl for many years, and did not think to hear from him again. He knows that I am a recluse and see no one. However, I am pleased to welcome any friend of his, and beg to offer you the hospitality my house affords. My daughter will take you to the Library, where I will join you when I have changed my habit, for I am somewhat soiled and heated."

He spoke with great deliberation and gravity. Melisent could see that he was profoundly displeased, and for a moment even the Stranger was daunted, but only for a moment. He was quick to recover his normal self-assurance.

"I thank you, sir, and beg to offer you my card, with Lord Darchester's letter," he said, tendering both as he spoke.

De Paganel received them coldly, bowed, and went out, leaving the new-comer alone with Melisent in the dark hall. It did not trouble his mind that she likewise might feel 'soiled and heated' with her violent exercise, or that to throw her thus into the company of an unknown man was an act of cruelty to a girl brought up, as she had been, in complete seclusion. In an agony of shyness, she began to tremble and breathe hard, unable to speak a word.

But the Stranger put her at more ease by a laughing sentence.

"It is truly a relief to find living people here," he declared. "Your servant was so very mysterious, and vanished from my sight so suddenly, that I really began to think she must be a wraith, with no objective existence. Yet she *looked* solid."

Melisent smiled tremulously, but still dared not trust her tongue to speak. She stood, flushed and frightened, with her mask in one hand and her foil in the other.

"Allow me to replace these for you," said the Stranger, taking them from her nerveless hands. "Some day I trust you will give me the pleasure of a bout with you. I am afraid I cannot claim to be the Prince you are expecting, but I may be some sort of a substitute, if a poor one, in default of him."

He looked down at her with such bold admiration in his black eyes that she began to burn to the very tips of her fingers, and felt ready to cry. But she was saved from this last disgrace by the entrance of Verily, full tilt upon her, wringing both hands in great affright, and wholly blind to the presence of the visitor, who stood beyond Melisent in deepest shadow.

"Lord save us all, Honeysweet! We shall all be robbed and murdered in our beds!" she cried. "For I ha' let a strange man into the house, and he hath vanquished—I know not where. God ha' mercy on me for a witless fool, and worse! . . . La! . . . there he is . . . for sure! I do beg your pardon, sir."

Her change of voice, from frenzied fear to relief and apology made them both laugh, and Melisent found her power of speech.

"What made thee leave this gentleman alone so long, Verily?" she asked.

The shoulders of the poor wench began to heave, and Melisent could see, even in the uncertain light, her blotched and swollen features. The truth was revealed without words.

"Poor soul!" she said softly, laying her arm tenderly over the heaving shoulders. "Thou hast again been disappointed, Verily, but take heart! He will come yet, never fear. Go now and light the lamp in the Library. We come there to await my father. Will you follow me, sir?"

"To the end of the world," he answered gallantly, fixing on her once more the bold and ardent gaze that sent such unknown tremors racing through her veins. She could not meet that gaze, but none the less bore herself proudly as she turned and led the way to her father's room.

CHAPTER VIII

"Carnations is for gratiousness,
marke that now by the way,
Have no regard to flatterers,
nor passe not what they say.
For they will come with lying tales
your eares for to fulfil;
In anie case do you consent
nothing vnto their wil."

A Nosegaie alvvaies Sweet.

As the stranger turned to follow her, he was startled to see two small green lights on the dark staircase he had to pass, and something white glide swiftly down to Melisent's feet. He knew it instantly for a cat, but it gave him a momentary sensation of fear.

"My beautiful Pearl baby!" whispered Melisent, taking it up in her arms.

"I see it is a case of 'love me, love my cat,'" said the Stranger with a laugh; "but I could wish your arms a better office, my dear young lady." He pulled Pearl's ear as he spoke.

Melisent flashed an angry glance upon him and shrank away. His voice, his laugh, and the look in his eyes deepened her distrust of him.

"Do not leave me, Verily, I beg," she murmured in the maid's ear, at the Library door. "Find something to do until my father cometh."

Verily signified consent, and they entered.

"What a charming room!" the Stranger remarked, when the maid had lighted the lamps and was closing

the shutters. "Is this your *sanctum sanctorum,* Miss de Paganel?"

"It is my father's study," she replied, standing by the hearth, with Pearl still lying on his back, childwise, in her arms. "Verily, I see there is but little wood. Will you make ready the embers while I go fetch some?"

She waited for no answer, but escaped from the room swiftly. In the passage outside she drew a long breath of relief.

"Pearl, Pearl!" she whispered, "I do fear him—why do I fear him, Pearl? Why hath he come? What is his will? If I but knew!"

She did not return with the wood, but waited till Verily came out. Then she demanded of her:

"Who is the Stranger, Verily? Why is he here? Canst answer me?"

Verily looked very wise.

"It may be that the fame of thy beauty hath reached him, Honeysweet, and that he is truly thy lover instead of mine—alack!" she sighed.

"Now, the Heavens forbid!" cried Melisent. "I like him not, dear Verily. I fear him. Are all gentlemen so . . . so——" She could not find a word.

"He is a personable man, Sweet, and not unlike my Jehoram"—she choked a little—"in height, I mean, and a darkness of skin—nothing more. And I do think thou hast enslaved him. I marked well the way he looked upon thee."

"Tush, Verily! Thy fancy paints all the world in love. He did ask for my father, not me. I would know what right he hath to call me 'dear young lady,' and pull my darling's ear."

"Never fret thyself. Whether he cometh for good

or ill, thy father will soon send him packing, I doubt not. We know full well that he cannot endure visitors. Maybe the Stranger hath been urged by an itching curiosity to see the Library, or house, as others before him. If so, he will have to make a quick despatch, I'll warrant. For ever since those London scholars did try to get from the Master the 'luminated missals which were writ in King Stephen's day, we know how afeared he hath been of strangerfolk."

"I hope, indeed, thy words are true," said Melisent, but half convinced. "But I fear . . . I do not know what I fear. There is ill boding in the air."

"Beshrew all bodings. I'll ha' no more of 'em!" cried Verily, with vehemence. "Did not all my signs come wrong? They are a pack of old wives' tales."

Melisent smiled. She knew this mood of Verily's so well. It came after every disappointment, and lasted only a few hours. The poor maid could no more shake off her belief in omens than she could shed her skin.

Leaving Verily to carry wood into the Library, Melisent mounted the stone staircase with Pearl still in her arms. There was no light save from a painted window on the first landing, upon which, in dull stained glass, the arms of the de Paganels were emblazoned—'a dragon regardant vert, collared, holding between his paws an escutcheon sable charged with a besant azure,' according to heraldic lore. The dragon was moulded on the same lines as those of the stone beast in the court below, and appeared, at this moment, somewhat menacing; for the light of a half-moon shone through a flame issuing from his jaws, and flung a vivid yellow patch upon the black oak wainscot opposite. The effect was so curiously startling that Melisent paused before it with a slight shudder.

"Never have I seen the flame burn so bright," she murmured. "What means it—good or ill? Fire of sorrow or light of joy? Would that I knew!"

She went on to her bedchamber, and lighted there her candle. Setting it down on the carven press, above which hung an old ivory crucifix and rosary of ebony beads inlaid with gold, she went to the window and looked out upon the dark court beneath, where the Dragon's long shadow lay black in the moonlight that silvered its grey stone. A faint sound from it reached her, and, for the first time, she fancied it ominous of ill.

"I am a foolish dolt and wax as superstitious as Verily," she chid herself as she stepped out of her short skirt and hung it in the closet. "What harm can come to us worse than hath befallen? and do not angels guard the innocent?" She crossed herself, and took up a well-worn volume of Thomas à Kempis that lay upon the carven chest, a little book in Latin, whose meaning she knew by heart. "'If thine heart were sincere and upright, then would every creature be unto thee but a looking-glass of life and a book of holy doctrine.' Ah, but my heart is frail and weak, and I see nothing in the Stranger but evil. His eyes mock me; it is as if a dark shadow had fallen across my path. I pray he may not linger, but depart as suddenly as he came. Why—why do I feel thus? The Evil One doth not take shape now and appear unto men as of old. What do I fear? Pearl, happy elf, stop washing thine ear and tell me—why do I fear?"

While she disputed with herself vainly, her father descended to the Library, where the Stranger sat alone. Mr. de Paganel had never permitted himself to wear

what he deemed the indignity of modern masculine attire, but still clothed himself in knee-breeches and lace ruffles. His appearance, as he entered the room, was distinctly imposing, and his speech, delivered in a voice cold and incisive as a steel poniard, no less haughty than his mien.

"Lord Darchester informs me," he said, "that your name is Mr. Ivo Newman, and that you are noted as an archæologist and a scholar. I regret to say that information does not commend your presence to me, as I have reason to dread the visits of archæologists and scholars. In my eyes they are usually marauders."

His visitor smiled, very winningly. "I am afraid, sir, Lord Darchester has done me far too much honour," he observed. "I make no claim to be either archæologist or scholar, and I am certainly no marauder. My worst design upon you is to pick a brain of which I have heard great things, and to carry away from you some help and counsel upon a matter I have at heart. If in this I have presumed too far, I will take my leave of you, and thank you for such courtesy as you have afforded me."

His voice was very musical, and Mr. de Paganel felt its peculiar charm, as he replied:

"I should be sorry, sir, for you to leave here under an impression of my discourtesy, which, I must fain admit, you have, so far, a right to censure. Pray sit down and permit me to remove that impression. So long as you can assure me you have no designs upon my library, or possessions generally, I am happy to be of service to you. But first allow me to offer you a glass of wine, the famous white port of which a few bottles only remain in my cellar. And although it is

past its prime, I venture to believe that it hath few peers at this moment."

Ivo Newman drank with an expression of ecstasy. The wine was far too sweet for any modern palate, but he had no intention of expressing this fact. After praising it in judicious terms, he went on to say:

"To be brief concerning my own affairs, Mr. de Paganel, I am compiling what, I hope, may be rather an important work on 'Modern Representatives of the most Ancient British Families and their Influence To-day.' This involves, as you will understand, some inner knowledge of great houses and the characters of their owners. It is my desire, naturally, to include yourself, as the last of a great race of soldiers, statesmen, and philosophers; and I have been told—only by rumour certainly, for all news of you is very vague—that the living de Paganel can challenge comparison with his distinguished ancestors, if not excel them."

He watched his host's face narrowly as he spoke, and was able to note, under the aristocratic calm of the handsome features before him, a distinct mollification of the muscles, while the ghost of a gratified smile stole about the mouth, a mouth whose beauty was almost too womanish.

"I am at a loss to conceive how such a report could have reached you," said de Paganel. "It is, I protest, entirely unauthorized on my part. I boast no superior attributes, no claim to rank with my distinguished forefathers. You see before you a man of the most modest pretensions."

He spoke with the proud smile of one who inwardly believes himself to be beyond all criticism.

"I can well understand it," replied his visitor. "True greatness is ever modest. I look forward to

the time, sir, when your genius will be recognized, and a mere report converted into the trumpet call of fame. Perhaps one day I may be permitted to judge of the quality of that genius."

Godwin de Paganel mused, and a happy light came into his very blue eyes, his mouth curved into an open smile. He was wondering where the stranger could have been made aware of his genius, since the world at large was so far from him, and the little hamlet near which he lived knew him no more than it knew the Llama of Thibet ?

" I cannot imagine, sir," he said at last, " in what way I may be of service to you ; but if you will enlighten me upon the matter, I am yours to command."

" All I ask is that you tell me something of yourself, and your life work," was the prompt answer. " As a man of letters in a very humble way—very humble indeed, I assure you, since I work but to bring the talents of others to light—as a writer of books myself, I know something of the labour and travail through which the artist moves towards his goal. And the finer the work, the greater the travail. I should like to know something of your methods, sir, of the delicate processes of your brain."

(To himself he was thinking with triumph of the skilful manner in which he had embroidered a chance remark at the Chough and Crow into this elaborate flattery. " The Master o' Paganel Garth can do naught but write inside a book about nothing at all and nobody knows what," was the statement he had heard, and it had given him the clue he needed. Verily had truly betrayed the man before him into his hands when she had told this piece of news to a villager one day, in a moment of annoyance against the Master for his

supine indifference to the household cares which weighed so heavily upon her Honeysweet.)

"Ah!" sighed de Paganel. "You are right. It is forsooth a travail of spirit to suffer the throes of mental conception, the birth pangs of a mighty thought, the shivering fears lest it should never see the light, or, if ever, in shape abortive and despised. For that is what it signifieth to be a philosopher and poet in one, ever yearning after the Transcendent, ever striving to reach beyond the impermanence upon which our wretched humanity now standeth. But the world knoweth naught of all this."

The loosely hung jaw of the new-comer quivered in his efforts to suppress a smile, but he remained perfectly grave.

"The world, sir, has ever stoned its prophets and slain them with the sword," he said. "I am not of the world, and therefore I thank you, with all my heart, for the inner glimpse of your mind vouchsafed to me. Although no genius myself, I am, at least, gifted with the discernment to appreciate it in others."

"And that I hold to be one of the highest gifts," said his host blandly. "It is truly a pleasure to me to converse with one who can comprehend so perfectly the strivings of the creative spirit. If you will do me the pleasure to sup with me this even, I shall esteem it a great honour."

"The honour would be entirely mine," returned his guest; "but I fear that my staying might incommode your household. I have forced myself upon you so unceremoniously that I feel some shame in accepting such a kind invitation."

"I beg you will not allow the thought to trouble your mind for one moment," said de Paganel, "for

I do protest nothing would pleasure me more than your company at our board. Our fare is of the simplest; but Verily is an exceedingly good cook, and I can, as you have proved, put before you a delectable bottle of wine."

"Your conversation, sir, would make any fare palatable," declared his guest; "and if you consider what my dinner would have been like at the village inn, I am sure there is nothing that you can offer me which would not be a rich feast in comparison. I have already sampled two meals at the inn, and words fail to describe their atrocity."

De Paganel smiled. "They are not used to the entertainment of gentlemen there," he said. "Few ever come this way."

"So I should judge," replied Newman dryly; "for there is only one thing worse than their food—their beds!"

While they were speaking, Verily came in to lay the cloth upon a table near one of the fireplaces, for supper.

"We always sup here when alone," explained Mr. de Paganel, "and trust you will deem it no slight to be treated *en famille*."

"On the contrary, I appreciate it as a great compliment," was the reply.

"Then if you will permit me, I will descend to my cellar and see what may be unearthed there worthy your taste. Perhaps you may be interested in examining my books during my short absence. I pray you consider yourself at home. Verily, this gentleman will sup with us to-night."

"Lord save us!" ejaculated Verily under her breath. She said aloud, "Very good, Master," and went out demurely.

Once in the corridor she ran upstairs to Melisent's room, bursting in upon the girl as she was clasping a zone of filigree silver round her short-waisted gown.

"What's to do now, Mistress, d'ye think? Wonders will never cease! Thy father hath asked the dark Stranger to sup."

Melisent's hands fell, and she turned sharply.

"What art thou saying, Verily? It cannot be," she said. "My father would never ask a strange man to sup with us. 'Tis impossible."

"'Tis Gospel true, Sweetie, and the Master hath gone to the cellar to fetch up a bottle of his best wine, leaving the visitor alone in the Library—all alone with his precious books—think on't! I could ha' swooned when he bid me prepare for three. And me wi' barely enow vegetables for the two of you. 'Tis much to be hoped the gentleman hath not a craving belly, for sure there'll be little to fill it."

"But what . . . why is he here, Verily?" Melisent demanded. "How did he compass it? How cozened my father? What doth it mean?"

"Depend on't, he is a wooer for thine hand, Mistress. That be the only reason I can see," declared Verily. "And now, having warned ye, I must back to my work. Ah, Pearl!"—as the cat followed her to the door—"after all, thou didst not wash over thy left ear for nothing." And she clattered away down the passage with the cat after her, scenting his supper.

Melisent stood before the glass moodily, her heart oppressed by fears. She did not share Verily's opinion that the Stranger had come to woo her, but could form no other conjecture in any way satisfactory. There was a flush of excitement on her soft cheeks when she

went down, a few minutes later, to take her place at the supper table, a rich colour which made her appear so dazzling that the Stranger's dark eyes were fixed upon her very often during the meal in a manner destructive to her peace and her appetite. She was thankful when she could escape to her parlour for the evening's study with Swithun.

CHAPTER IX

" The Crocodile with fainèd teares
The Fisher not so oft beguiles
As thou haste luld my simple eares
To here sweet words full fraught with wiles."
A proper new Ditty : Intituled Fie vpon Loue.

" FORGIVE me for remarking, sir, that your daughter is a most beautiful young lady, and ought to take her place in society," Ivo Newman observed, when Melisent had left the Library.

" I entertain no very high opinion of modern society," was the answer, given with indifference.

" Nor I, except as a means to an end. And it is every woman's end to marry. Miss de Paganel should make a great marriage."

" What then ? There would but be one de Paganel the less."

" It is unfortunate that she is not a son," observed Newman, and became instantly aware that he had made a mistake. Mr. de Paganel knitted his delicate brows slightly, as he was wont to do when anything offended his taste. He did not reply. His visitor, anxious to repair the error he had made, and trusting the only method he knew, proceeded to blunder further.

" It is a national calamity that so distinguished a name should die out," he said ; " and, if I might be pardoned a piece of presumption, I would venture to express some surprise that the Master of Paganel

Garth has never remarried. It seems to me an injustice to the fair ladies of England."

"And it seems to me, sir, a matter in which I alone am concerned," said his host frostily. "The bottle stands by you. Will you not refill your glass."

"I thank you." He poured out the wine slowly, and spoke with even more languid sweetness than before. "Upon that point, Mr. de Paganel, I fear we must agree to differ. To my mind it concerns every Englishman whether a noble race dies out or not. But, at the same time, I fully understand the position in which you find yourself. There can be few, even in this age of brilliant women, fit to mate with one, who, like yourself, unites an intellect rare and apart with high birth and unique possessions."

His host filled his own glass, and raised it to the light with a slightly bitter smile, pausing before he spoke.

"My unique possessions," he said, "are coveted only by collectors and custodians of museums. As you are so gracious as to express an interest in my affairs," he continued, with some irony, "I cannot refuse to tell you the reason I have not wed a second time. The fortunes of my house do not permit me to present myself as suitor for the hand of any lady whose rank equals my own."

"Sir, I appreciate such noble pride and delicacy of feeling," declared his guest, "but I cannot believe that there exists in this country any woman, of whatever rank or wealth, who would not consider herself honoured by the offer of your hand in marriage."

"No man of my race hath ever bartered his name for rank or wealth," replied Mr. de Paganel coldly; "and I have no desire to mend my estate by so distasteful a proceeding."

"I see how it is," said Newman, with a smile. "You have, in addition to the large stock of pride inherited from generations of de Paganels, the artistic temperament, the sensitive fastidious dislike of anything that savours of the mercenary. Well, I can only admire and marvel—from a distance. I must confess, the material things of this life have their attraction for me, and I should always be inclined to make the most of my earthly opportunities. You, on the other hand, would, I have no doubt, rather be the creator of a perfect work of art than have a son to bear your name."

"Infinitely."

The ice was broken between them, and they talked as two men who had known each other for years. It is true Mr. de Paganel did not suffer any cross-examination on his private affairs, but he betrayed to his guest much more of his subjective personality than he had the least intention of doing. Their conversation drifted presently to books, and then he did the honours of his library.

"Here are two of my treasures," he said, taking from a locked glass case an old leather-covered volume in a wonderful state of preservation. "*The Book of the Subtyl Hystoryes and Fables of Esope, which were translated out of Frensshe into Englysshe by Wylliam Caxton*, 1483," he read from the title-page; "and a Wynkyn de Worde *Mort d'Arthur*, of 1529. There are copies in the British Museum, and, I believe, at Oxford, but I do not know where else. Here is another quaint book—*A Handful of Honeysuckles*, 1580—and oh, here—I would not neglect to show you my *Arte of Warre*. Camden's *Queen Elizabeth* is a worthy book; it is on this shelf, with the other his-

torical works, an early edition—note the fine tooling of the leather."

"Your ancestors seem to have had an eye for good literature, and plenty of money to buy the best books," observed Newman, trying to manifest the rapture expected from him in tribute to these musty volumes, which, truth to tell, aroused very little interest in his mind beyond a vague speculation as to their probable value in gold.

"Thou say'st well," said his host, who, becoming absorbed in his search for certain volumes, began to relapse more and more into the archaic form of speech he had chosen to adopt. "In good sooth they did choose of the best, and it redoundeth to our pride that no book of any worth bought by a de Paganel hath ever been permitted to leave this Library. 'Tis part of our family honour. We would liefer burn it to the ground than sell so much as one of its least valued possessions. Mark here my precious Skelton's *Bowge of Court*, a truly diverting satire, and *Pleasure—A Joyfull Medytacyon to all England*. Behold *Hours of the Virgin* with miniatures, initials, and borders by English artists of the fifteenth century. Didst ever see sweeter work? But I have a *Roman de la Rose* somewhere with the same by French artists, even more delectable. Where lies it? Ah, I remember! Melisent did beg for it to read with her Chaucer. I hope the child hath it safe."

"Surely she cannot read this ancient print!" Newman exclaimed.

"That she can, forsooth, and in French and Latin, as featly as in English. She is very apt to learn. Even now, I'll warrant she poreth over books."

(As she certainly did; for at that moment she was

reading aloud to Swithun from the old French book in question.)

"Here are later books," Mr. de Paganel went on. "*Britannia's Pastorals*, 1616; and a copy of *The Hind and the Panther*, that is, I believe, rare. A first edition of the *Hesperides*, by Herrick, hath some value to-day, and I have here a right excellent print—*The Heirarchie of the Bleſſed Angells, wherein ye may read the names, orders, and Offices of these Celestiall Beings, and all concerning the Fall of Lucifer, done into Verse by Thomas Heywood*, 1635. Their names are such music in mine ears, that I do love to speak them aloud. Uriel, Tophiel, Zaphkiel, Zadchiel, Raphael, Camael, Michael, Gabriel, and others. I prithee listen to this stanza:

"'Of Satan's Wiles and Feats prestigious,
Appearing wondrous and prodigious,
Confirm'd by hystories far sought,
Of Novels by bad Daemons wrought,
That still with Mankinde seeke congression.
(To whose falle they themselves apply)
Called Succubæ and Incubi.
To finde these further we desire
Of Water, Earth, the Aire, the Fire.
And what their workings be, to know
As well above as here below.
How author's 'mong themselves agree
What Genii and Spectars be;
Faunes, Sylvans and Alastores,
Satyres and others like to these,
With stories mixt that grace may win
From such as are not verst therein.'

"Then saith Gabriel:

"'Of spirits called Lucifugi
(From flying light) I next apply—
Of Robin Goodfellow and of Fairies,
With many other strange vagaries
Done by hobgoblins. I next write——'"

At this moment Newman dropped a book he was holding, with a sharp exclamation of self-reproach. His host's attention was diverted, as he examined the volume carefully, to see that no harm was done, all his books being as precious to him as children.

"Pray do not distress yourself," he said courteously, after this examination. "There is naught amiss."

"Heaven be praised for that!" ejaculated Newman. "For had I damaged it, you would never have given one of your treasures into my clumsy hands again. All that you have been reading is extremely interesting; the serious way in which the author attacks his subject is most amusing—obviously without a doubt of any kind. And that reminds me, I have heard that you possess the most remarkable library of occult lore in England. Is it so?"

"Assuredly. But I have not shown you my *Vita Nuova*, a rare copy, and a Missal of the fourteenth century, illumined by a de Paganel, who afterwards became Cardinal. You may read all about him in a book I have here. Ah, where is it? But no matter. He was a fine artist as well as a fine cleric, and it is my desire one day to decorate my own book after the same fashion, when I shall have time to make the fair devices. There are many other noble books I would fain show you. This copy of *De Confessione Amantis* is a second edition by Berthelet, 1522, more to my liking than the first of Caxton's. And, a lesser poet than Gower, yet greatly to my taste, is Chamberlayne, whose *Pharonnidar* hath a charm all its own. Would I could lay my hands on it."

The visitor yawned as he followed his host to another case, and cogitated in his mind by what means he could put an end to this interminable exhibition

of books in which he had not the slightest interest. There was a part of the Library he wanted to explore, however, and at last he managed to draw Mr. de Paganel back to the subject he had broached before, without success—the works collected by the Alchemist, Ansculf de Paganel, in the sixteenth century.

It seemed to him that his host was somewhat reluctant to talk of this question, or show his collection of Hermetic works.

"If you wish, certainly," he said; "but I find these books dull and not very precious, albeit they represent the wisdom of that age. 'Tis strange how they escaped destruction when the house was searched from roof to cellar for proofs of sorcery and illegal practices. Such books were usually burnt in the market places. I know not why these were spared; for, of a certitude, they do witness to many forms of sortilege and art magic, and all those strange sciences which were first practised in the East, and brought hither by Arabian and other sages. Here they are."

He brought Newman to a part of the Library where one of the windows jutted on to the terrace outside, forming a square alcove, and where, on either side of the window, were ranged many rows of bookshelves containing leather-covered and dusty tomes, looking, as Mr. de Paganel had said, dull, and evidently much neglected. One shelf was devoted entirely to parchment manuscripts.

Newman took down several of the volumes and looked into them, but they conveyed nothing to him, being written in Latin, and in old Latin, with black-lettering. *De Magia Veterum*, by Arbatel; *The Mirror of Alchemy*, by Roger Bacon; translations of Hermes Trismegistus, Paracelsus, Geber—even the names had

no meaning for him. He took down a smaller book and opened it at random, upon a recipe of the Elixir of Life, reading with some difficulty :

"Ten parts of celestiall slime; separate the male from the femail, and each afterwards from its own earth, physically, mark you, and with no violence. Conjoin after separation in due, harmonic, vitall proportion, straightway the Soul, descending from the pyroplastic sphere, shall restore, by a myrific embrace, its dead and deserted body. Proceed according to the Volcanico magical theory till they are exalted into the Fifth Metaphysical Rotæ."

"What frightful gibberish this is!" exclaimed Newman. "Do you suppose they knew what it meant themselves?"

"The initiated knew. It was needful, you are doubtless aware, for those who pursued the science of Alchemy, and other kindred sciences, to make use of a terminology that concealed their ideas and discoveries, in order to baffle the dangerous curiosity of the vulgar. Paracelsus, into whose works I have more than once dipped, uses such terms as 'Flying Eagle,' 'Green Lion,' 'Flower of the Lily,' and many others to signify certain minerals or chemicals used in their alchemic labours. Would it had not been so, for it is thus that my ancestor, Ansculf de Paganel, disguised his thought in the few manuscripts he hath left behind him, which are therefore to us, as you say, 'gibberish,' without sense or meaning."

"Did he leave many such documents?" asked Newman, with suppressed eagerness.

"Nay, but few, and so writ that no man living may read them."

"I should have thought that there would be experts

to-day capable of reading anything. If the tombs of the Pharaohs can be compelled to yield up their secrets, surely a sixteenth-century kabbala might be laid bare.

"If mine ancestor had used but the ordinary symbolism of the Alchemists to veil his meaning, it is true that his notes might well be interpreted by any student of that science," responded Mr. de Paganel; "but he wrote, moreover, in a cipher of his own, to which there is no key."

"But experts in cryptography can unravel the most intricate cipher!" cried Newman, for the moment forgetting his policy of self-suppression. "I could find you one who——"

"Sir," interrupted his host with dignity, "we de Paganels have never been wont to take strangers into our counsels, nor permit the interference of those outside our family into matters which concern us alone. If past secrets be not revealed to us, and we are content to remain in ignorance of them, to whom else should they be revealed? It is now three centuries since Ansculf de Paganel lived and pursued his researches in this house. If none of my forebears have attempted to bring to light that which he thought well to hide, is there any cause why I should be the first to do so, or profane our house with the curiosity of the vulgar? I prithee let us discuss this subject no farther."

Newman ground his teeth in silence at his own foolish precipitancy, and humbly begged forgiveness. "One more wrong move," he reflected, "and I shall be fired out, neck and crop. What a peppery old fool he is, with his absurd family pride and antediluvian notions!" Aloud he said, when they were again seated, "And now, my dear sir, I should much

like to ask a favour of you, which I do not deserve to have granted, but throw myself on your goodness and courtesy. Dare I express it ?"

"Pray do so," answered de Paganel, the cloud still on his brow, but a thaw in his voice.

"It is to afford me the great pleasure of reading some of your own work," said Newman, with assumed diffidence and caressing sweetness of tone. "Unworthy as I am of such an honour, I may at least say that no one in the world could feel a deeper interest in any child of your brain than I ; and if the request seem to you officious or impertinent, I can but express once more my regret. But I will not pretend to be what I am not. I am a man of my time, and a living genius attracts me more than a hundred dead ones. Much as I appreciate the wisdom of the ancients, I appreciate far more the wisdom of my contemporaries, and am hungry, sir, for the fruit of your cultured mind—cultured as few are to-day—for the expression of yourself in the highest form of art."

Godwin de Paganel's brow cleared, and a smile played at the corners of his too handsome mouth.

"I am extremely sensible," he replied, "of the compliment you pay my poor efforts, but they are as yet unprinted, therefore hardly to be read. If, however, you care to look upon their outer casket, I shall be happy to show you wherein I write whensoever an inspiration cometh to me. But first let me find you a cigar, for it hath just come to my mind that, being a modern man, you may indulge in tobacco."

"I do, indeed," replied Newman, with a laugh, being rarely without a cigarette in his mouth, and having a great longing at this moment for the fragrant

weed. "But you, sir, I conclude, have not cultivated the noxious habit?"

"It hath never seemed to me a habit for gentlemen," replied his host calmly, as he unearthed a small box of very choice Spaniards, whose aroma was very delectable to the visitor's nostrils.

"If you do not mind the smoke——" Newman looked at him inquiringly before taking one of the cigars.

"Not in the least. I shall be happy if you find them to your liking. They have been in my possession untouched a long while," was the answer.

"And your book?" asked the younger man, lighting a match.

"It is here. But first let us replenish our glasses, and I will call Verily to throw fresh logs upon the fire. The Spring nights are chilly."

His reserve had thawed once more, and when, in response to his gong, Verily received her orders and left the room again, Mr. de Paganel began to talk of himself, his conceptions, opinions, and aspirations, somewhat shyly at first, but, encouraged by his listener, with more and more confidence as he went on. After a while he lost his usual restraint of manner, and divulged his inmost soul to the man before him, in a curious mixture of Tudor and Addisonian English, that could hardly be called affected, since it came to him in his most unselfconscious moments. He betrayed a strange passion for everything past and gone, for old creeds, old ideals, philosophies, customs, traditions, conventions, and forms of art. Everything he thought modern was to him contemptible, and as he never read a newspaper, or kept pace with his time in any way, his notion of modernity stopped short at the age of

Byron, did not embrace Tennyson or Swinburne, of whom he was blissfully ignorant. Newman, not a very imaginative man, felt there was something uncanny about this attitude of life, in which de Paganel seemed to sit in a romantic bower of his own making, with cobwebs spun over the door, thick cobwebs through which he could not, or would not, break. And the novelty of this archaism held a certain fascination for one who was new to his finger-tips, a typical product of the twentieth century. He was bored, it is true, but not too bored to feel amused at intervals, and maintain, without great effort, an expression of absorbed interest in his host's conversation.

The hours went fast for Godwin de Paganel, who had never before found himself in the company of so sympathetic and responsive a listener.

CHAPTER X

"And but your word will helen hastily
My hertes wound, while that it is grene,
Your eyen two will sle me sodenly:
I may the beauty of hem not sustene,
Upon my troth I say you feithfully
That ye be of my life and deth the quene."

Chaucer.

"So smooth, so sweet, so silvery is thy voice,
As, could they hear, the damn'd would make no noise,
But listen to thee, walking in thy chamber,
Melting melodious words to lutes of amber."

Herrick.

In the Dame's Parlour Melisent read aloud, alternately, from the old French *Roman de la Rose* and from Chaucer's lovely version of it, explaining to Swithun, as she went on, such words as he appeared not to understand. Her presence, her voice, and the faint aroma of those old essences in which her garments had long been stored—perfumes of musk, ambergris, pomander and spikenard, with the homelier lavender—always brought about that same entrancement of the senses he had felt on their first evening together, and he had persuaded her that he profited more by her reading to him than by the lessons he learnt and repeated. When, therefore, he had ground through a certain number of grammar rules, she rewarded him with extracts from her favourite old English, French, and Latin authors, and he soon progressed in his understanding of them so far as to be able to follow

much that she read without translation or explanation on her part. She thought him an exceedingly quick pupil!

On this evening she had declared herself too weary to teach, and from the heightened crimson of her cheeks and deeper hue of her eyes Swithun had divined an inner excitement—and its cause. She took up the *Roman* as soon as she was seated, and read hastily, almost feverishly, with an impatience rare in her when he requested the meaning of a word or phrase. But by degrees her agitation calmed down, and, when she presently changed the French book for her beloved Chaucer, her usual sweet serenity became quite restored under the influence of its music—that haunting music of old verse, in which the uninitiated find neither rhyme nor rhythm. Given in Melisent's soft voice, spoken with a full appreciation of every accent's value, it had so much of both that her hearer felt the room and his own heart beat time to it. Its harmonies circled about him in magnetic waves; the magic of it enthralled his senses. He experienced something like a shock, therefore, when the music sank into an abrupt silence, as piercing to his consciousness as sharp sound.

"Swithun, you were asleep," said Melisent, with a reproachful look.

"Not I!" he exclaimed indignantly, adding, after a pause: "Could I really have been dreaming? I was here; I saw your face and heard your voice; but it was not like being awake, either, for the room was full of fauns and fairies and good angels."

"If you were awake," she said, trying to look severe, "tell me what were the words I read last."

"'Your eyen two will slay me suddenly,
I can the beauty of hem not sustain,'

and—let me see—what next ?—

'Upon my troth I say you faithfully
That ye be of my life and death the Queen,'"

he replied, with a penetrating luminous gaze into her eyes.

Her colour burned high. "Which showeth that you slept! I read those lines long before. Were they truly the last you heard ?"

"I heard many after, but only those remained in my mind," he said. "They seem to have an echoing quality. Please do not believe I slept; it was but a trance, at worst—the enchantment that your beautiful reading casts upon me. I could not really sleep in your presence, even if I were dying of fatigue—that I swear. Will you not go on . . . madam ?"

"Nay," she answered, with a curious little break in her voice. "I am very weary. I think I will go to my bed."

She did not essay to rise, however, and after a pause Swithun said:

"Do you not, then, play piquet with the Master to-night ?"

"My father hath a visitor, and doth not want me," she responded. "Did not Verily tell you ?"

"She told me that a dark stranger had come, whom she had at first taken for her Jehoram. But I did not know he stayed so late."

"Heaven knows how late he will stay!" she exclaimed petulantly. "I know not even why he is here, or what is his will. Oh, Swithun, my heart misgiveth me! I like not this dark stranger. He hath the evil eye—I fear it!"

"Verily told me he was a well-spoken gentleman," said Swithun, without looking at her, and stroking gently the white cat, who lay asleep between them on the table. Pearl, fearful of men generally, never resented his touch or fled from him, and often slept at his feet.

"Verily spake true," rejoined Melisent, with some bitterness. "He is smooth-tongued and beguiling. He did not know I observed him at supper-time, but I did, and saw how he cozened my father. It is by that means he hath won his way here and is suffered to stay so long."

"You have taken a dislike to him." Swithun spoke musingly, and still with averted eyes. "I wonder why."

"Because . . . oh, I know not! He pulled my Pearl's ear, and looked at me as if . . . as if I had no soul. His words made me shiver, and his eyes are—hateful! He hath not the mind of a true man, methinks."

Swithun marvelled that so young a girl, reared in solitude and simplicity, could thus sum up a man's personality. He seemed to see the dark stranger before him.

"I should have thought," he said, eager to learn more from her, "that you would have welcomed anyone who came from the larger world, and brought fresh life into your hermitage. What does he talk of? Is he not entertaining?"

"He is entertaining enow, and made me laugh—oh yes, he talks well of many things, and his voice is agreeable to the ear. But . . . Swithun, why do we like some folk and dislike others, for no reason?"

"It is attributed to feminine intuition," he replied. Melisent looked at him a little perplexed.

"I know not what that means, truly. But this I know—that if Mr. Ivo Newman had come to me in answer to my quest for a gardener, I would have bid him begone at once, for I could not endure him about the place."

"I am very glad," quoth Swithun, with a smile, "that you did not bid me begone."

"There was no fear of it. I felt that God had sent thee to my need," she said simply.

A sudden warmth spread about Swithun's heart and tingled in his ears. He had no word to say, and silence fell between them.

It was broken by the sudden entrance of Verily, who bounced in upon them with hands uplifted.

"Lord ha' mercy!" she cried. "And what, think ye, is going to happen now? Mistress . . . Honeysweet . . . he's bid to stay the night, and sleep i' the Murrey Chamber, which ha' not bin slep' in for a matter o' ten year a more, since your poor Aunt Lucilla was laid out there—rest her soul! What's to do? Oh, dearie me!"

Melisent rose from her seat, the colour fading from her face as the sky fades after sunset.

"Thou'rt raving, Verily . . . it cannot be!" she gasped. "Stay the night in this house—an unknown stranger!' 'Tis impossible; my father would never invite him. Thou didst not hear aright."

"'Tis magic, I say," groaned Verily. "Thy father is bewitched. God save him! I knew the dark stranger boded no good when I did see he was not my Jehoram. And, now I come to think on 't, there was a crow flew hard by the house this morning—sure and certain token o' sorrow! Oh, why did I sing before breakfast! It always bringeth tears before supper."

"Cease prating, Verily, and let me think," said Melisent, knitting her fine brows. "There must be a fire lighted in the Murrey Chamber, and that right quickly, for the room will be damp. And if it be true, as thou sayeth, that Mr. Newman is to lie here to-night, by my father's command, we must show him fair hospitality, e'en though we like him not."

"May the Lady Lucilla moan and gibber round his bed in her winding-sheet all night!" muttered Verily. Melisent was thinking too hard to hear this charitable wish.

"I doubt it will be hard to build a fire there. The chimney hath not been used for so long, and when I last did go therein the hearth was all littered from the jackdaws," she said, pondering. "How much coal have we, Verily?"

"Scarce enow for the kitchen fire to last out the week," was the maid's answer; "and how like are we to come by more until thy lace is paid for, or that——"

"Peace, Verily!" exclaimed the young girl, flushing; "that is not for common talk. We must build the fire of wood, with as much coal as thou canst spare, and waste no time about it. Come!"

She lighted a candle that stood on the table, and swept to the door with an imperious air. Swithun had never before seen her so much house-mistress; and the revelation of dire poverty just vouchsafed to him gave the proud poise of her head a pathetic significance.

"Will you let me light the fire, madam?" he begged, stepping forward to open the door for her. "It is, as you have seen in the garden, one of my great accomplishments, and I enjoy doing it."

She gave him a warm and grateful smile.

"Nay, Swithun; a hearth fire is not like a bonfire,"

she said, "and thou'rt not a house servant, forsooth. Verily and I can kindle it right featishly."

Her lapse into Chaucer English betrayed a gentle familiarity that pleased him. It was but seldom she spoke thus to him, and he felt it almost as a caress.

"But it would give me such pleasure," he urged. "Please don't deny me. There will be enough for you and Verily to do with the bedclothes and other things. It is late, and you have not much time."

"It is true," she cried, in a tone of poignant distress. "Yes, it must be very late. Oh, if only my father would think! If he but knew how——"

She paused abruptly. It was the first time Swithun had heard even such vague criticism of her father from her lips, and he knew that it must hurt her.

> "For to be wroth with those we love
> Doth work like madness in the brain."

He filled in the pause quickly. "We do not know his reasons. There may be a question of policy concerned, or perhaps the Master feels bound to offer hospitality to the stranger within his gates," he suggested. Melisent thanked him with a glance.

"Thou'rt right—my father knoweth best," she said. "Come, let us see what is to do."

This tacit acceptance of his services was enough. Swithun followed her and Verily upstairs with a sense of elation.

On the wall opposite the staircase window the patch of topaz light showed where the Dragon's mouth still flamed in the moonlight.

"See!" cried Melisent; "that hath only fallen so once before in my life, when my father was sick, and

we feared for his life. Can there be aught in Verily's words, that sorrow cometh unto this house?"

"'Tis sorrow enough to have a hungry man come to eat up house and home, to say naught o' good coal, and keepen us outen our beds till past midnight," quoth Verily, in an aggrieved voice.

"It seems to me," said Swithun gravely, "that the light issuing from the Dragon's jaws, being gold colour, betokens fortune."

Melisent paused a moment by the yellow stain. "May it not be both—gold and sorrow? 'Fortune never comes with both hands full,'" she quoted.

Then, opening the door into a cold, windy chamber, she set down the light upon a mighty oaken press that stood just within. A huge four-post bedstead, hung with heavy, dingy curtains, seemed to rear itself out of the gloom against them, and beyond it was a great open fireplace.

As Melisent had said, it was all littered with the nesting of jackdaws in the chimney, and looked a very hopeless place in which to build a fire.

"Is there no other room habitable?" asked Swithun, when he had examined it.

"None whose bed is not dropping to pieces," replied Melisent. "This is the best, indeed, the only one that hath been at the service of guests these many years. He might have my room, and I sleep here, or in the Library, but——"

"That we would never allow, would we, Verily?" said Swithun; and the maid answered promptly:

"Why no, forsooth."

"Leave the fire to me," he went on, "and I will soon have a roaring blaze. The jackdaws must find a fresh home, if there are any in the chimney; but I

fancy there is room enough for them and the smoke," he concluded, after going into the fireplace and looking up the huge aperture. The draught from it was very great.

Thereupon the three of them worked with a will to make order in the room. It was only when Verily and Melisent had gone to carry blankets to the kitchen fire that Swithun desisted from his labours and began to ponder a little.

"What was the name she said? It sounded familiar. Let me see . . . Lawson . . . Cohen . . . I know . . . Newman. The sound of that name, somehow, does not commend itself to me. Why is he here? It cannot be possible that he, too, is on the scent! But no! that were too fantastic an assumption. How could he know what I know? And how on earth has he contrived to obtain an invitation to stay the night? He must be devilishly clever, or possessed of some secret influence. What can it be? When I wrote, two years ago, begging to be allowed to examine the Library, I met with a firm and frigid refusal from Godwin de Paganel, though he knew my father so well, and still visits his widow. I wonder if she ever comes here. It might be awkward if——"

His meditations were interrupted by the re-entrance of Melisent and Verily, but a few minutes later he found himself again alone. As soon as their footsteps died away, he examined carefully the lock of the chamber-door, clumsy and rusty, with a large key like that of a dungeon, which refused to turn properly.

"I will take charge of this," he reflected, smiling grimly, "in case of . . . accidents. It is as well to be on the safe side, and who knows what Mr. Newman's business here may be?"

He went to the candle and rolled the lower part of the key in its grease; then tried it again in the lock, shifting it until it moved easily. He was at this work when the sound of approaching voices warned him that Melisent and Verily were coming back along the shadowy corridor. The rays from their candle reached him just as he slipped inside the room again.

"Why, Swithun, what a fine blaze thou hast kindled!" exclaimed Melisent joyously. "We shall not give the Stranger an ague now."

"So much the worse!" muttered Verily, as she felt the bedding spread before the hearth.

"I flatter myself, madam, that I can build a fire against any man in Christendom," said Swithun, with natural pride, as he dropped the key of the chamber-door into his pocket.

CHAPTER XI

" And in her cheekes the vermeil red did show,
Like roses in a bed of lilies shed.
The which ambrosial odours from them threw
And gazers' sense with double pleasure fed.
Hable to heale the sicke and to revive the ded.
. . . And when she spake,
Sweet words, like dropping honey she did shed.
And 'twixt the perles and rubins softly brake
A silver sound that heavenly musick seemed to make."
Faerie Queene, Canto III., St. 22.

THE Gardener was at work before five o'clock next morning, digging the ground he had cleared of weeds the day before. It was pleasant, in the moist freshness of the air, to hear his spade ring to the joyous music of mating birds, music that swelled to its highest rapture before the sun rose and sank to a gentler chorus as the world grew light. Swithun, whose mind was never wholly idle, even in his hardest toil, found himself marvelling at the exquisite energy of his little feathered brothers in singing so lustily before they had caught the early worm for breakfast. It seemed as if the moment of waking was the signal for a burst of melodious activity, and that hunger did not follow upon sleep, but upon the exercise of those wonderful tiny lungs.

Thrush, linnet, and blackbird, the glorious mocker, had sung their matins, and were quietly feeding, when, through the sudden stillness, he heard on the hither

side of the hedge a sound even sweeter to his ears than the bird music. It was a first at soft, inarticulate crooning, but presently he heard the words of an old sad song. His heart seemed to contract with the sadness of it.

> "Sing all a green willow—
> Willow, willow, willow—
> Ah me, the green willow
> Shall be my gar*land.*"

The minor wail of the melody struck a false note in the harmony of the morning. Swithun straightened himself, and bethought him that he wanted directions for his day's work from his mistress. Shouldering his spade, therefore, he strode off to the Herb Garden, where he found her pulling up chickweed and groundsel in the thyme-bed, with her little ungloved hands, and still singing 'All a green willow.' Pearl sat close by, patting her hands and trying to induce her to play with him. She wore a long pinafore and pink sunbonnet of the flat and corded kind, with strings that are never tied.

"Go away, you bad little Pearl. Dost not see that I am busy and cannot play?" she paused to murmur, as Pearl rolled over and seized her hands in his two paws, biting it gently and laughing, if ever a cat may laugh, at her chidings. He was not two years old, and had all a kitten's love of fun.

Swithun took up a pebble and rolled it along the mossed path of the garden. Pearl sprang after it. Melisent stood up and faced him with light in her eyes.

"Swithun! How you startled me! I did not hear you come."

"I was on the other side of the hedge, and heard

you singing," he said. "It seemed to me a sad song for so merry a morning."

She smiled. "I do not feel merry, in sooth. But your rebuke is just. It is treason to the Springtime to sing sad songs."

"I did not venture to rebuke you, madam," he protested; "but I don't like to think of your being sad at any time. And why should you be? Are you not going to have a garden lovely as Eden soon, with all the kindly fruits of the earth to rejoice you? I came to tell you that there is a potato shooting through the earth already."

This was a sudden inspiration. He had not come with any such intention. She clasped her hands in delight.

"Oh, the good news! Take me to see it!" she cried. And together they went to examine the potato bed. Sure enough, there was a tiny thumb of green pushing up in one corner. She bent over it as if she had discovered a rare jewel.

"I shall soon have the cabbage-bed ready," declared Swithun. "And the peas will be sprouting soon."

"The lovely miracles!" Melisent exclaimed rapturously. "Isn't it wonderful—wonderful, Swithun, how they do it, all of themselves, the tiny things?"

"It is wonderful," he answered readily—"more wonderful than magic. One ought never to be sad in such a world of wonders."

"Nay, indeed. It was wicked of me, Swithun. And yet I did feel sad. I slept ill last night, and strange fears oppressed me. I heard the Dragon moaning many times, and there were strange sounds in the house. Once I did think I heard footsteps in the corridor, and thought—'It is Ansculf de Paganel coming to warn me.'"

"To warn you of what?" Swithun asked.

"Of . . . something . . . evil to come. I awoke with a heaviness. But it is all gone now. And in the daylight it seemeth to me that the sounds I heard last night could but have been the sleepy mutterings of jackdaws in the chimney, or the creaking of branches outside my window."

"What is this I hear?" said a voice behind the yew-hedge, breaking rudely in upon their conversation. "What is this I hear about sounds at night? Have others been disturbed as I was?"

The speaker joined them immediately, and took off his hat to Melisent with a great flourish. He nodded carelessly to Swithun, and flung a sweeping glance of scrutiny over him. Swithun touched his cap, but did not offer to go away.

"Good morning, Miss Millicent. You are indeed up betimes. I thought I was early, but you have shamed the lark," he said, in his cooing voice, while his dark eyes roved over her with admiring intentness. Her face, which had been a wild rose before, became richly tinted as a poppy. But although her black lashes fell, she spoke quite calmly.

"I trust, sir, you have not been disturbed. This house is usually very quiet, but I cannot deny that there are rats and——"

"Rats do not fasten bedroom doors," interrupted Newman, laughing. "It was something after midnight when your father and I parted, and I must have been in bed an hour, when I distinctly heard footsteps outside my window. I got up and looked out. There was enough moonlight for me to see a figure, walking —I suppose, to give the necessary thrill, I should have said gliding—along the terrace. I flung open

the window and sang out 'Hullo!' but there was no response. The ghost—let us call it—moved slowly into the deep shadow of the house, and was lost to view. I watched for some time to see it reappear, but it did not. Then I thought I would go down and investigate the mystery, feeling, by this time, wide awake. But when I came to open my door, I found, to my astonishment, it was locked!"

"'Tis impossible!" ejaculated Melisent, in agitation. She turned to Swithun, who was pulling up weeds slightly behind her. "What do you think of this?" she asked. "Did you note, Swithun, whether or no there was a key in this gentleman's door."

"There was no key in the door, madam, when I came out of the room," he replied, "so far as I can recollect."

This was perfectly true, the key being then in his own pocket.

There was a pause, during which Melisent glanced from one to the other in much perplexity.

"It is a mystery," she exclaimed; "for how could the door be locked if there was no key? Unless——" She paused, and Swithun knew that her mind sought a supernatural explanation.

"If I might be so bold, ma'am," he said, touching his cap with humility, and speaking in a manner unlike his usual utterance, "I should say as the door stuck, through not being used. I've had a job to open several of 'em since I came. And if it was really locked, how did the gentleman get out at all?"

Melisent gazed at him in mild surprise. His humble and bucolic tone was new to her. Yet, in spite of it, the thought flashed through her mind at this moment that Swithun looked like a Prince, and the stranger,

in his well-cut London clothes, appeared a swineherd by comparison. She could not conceive why. Newman laughed good-naturedly.

"A sapient conclusion, my man. The door was certainly unfastened this morning. I did not have to get out by the window. So we'll accept your solution of the problem and let it rest at that."

Swithun hurried away. When he was out of hearing, Newman continued: "Your Gardener has been well-drilled. He walks more like a soldier than a labourer, except for the stoop in his neck."

"He doth not stoop!" cried Melisent indignantly, then bit her lip and blushed. "He is of better condition than most gardeners," she added hastily, "and hath been servant to a scholar who taught him many things."

"He is fortunate in your favour," said Newman, looking at her under half-closed eyelids. "I could envy him his work under so fair a mistress."

Melisent wheeled round sharply, and began to walk towards the house.

"Don't go in yet," he implored. "I want you to show me over the grounds, and I am sure breakfast is not ready. Verily—isn't that her name?—was only just beginning to lay it when I came out."

"I must go to her aid," declared Melisent.

"No, no. Don't be unkind to me. I am really very unoffending."

At that instant Pearl came bounding out of the Herb Garden after a yellow butterfly, almost to their feet. At sight of Newman, his tail grew thick, and he fled incontinently.

"Your cat is as unfriendly as you are," said the young man, laughing.

"We are not used to strangers, sir," she replied.

"But common politeness enjoins courtesy to strangers. It is not civil to run away from them."

"I do not run away," protested Melisent, distressed; "indeed, you do misjudge me, sir. I would fain be courteous to all; but it is truly time to breakfast now, and——" She paused.

"So long as I have your company to breakfast I am content," he declared, trying to win a glance from her eyes. "And afterwards I will ask you to show me the garden. Will you?"

"I shall be happy," she faltered, with a stiff little curtsey.

The curtsey amused him. "She is like a rustic heroine in a comic opera," he thought, having no other image in his mind from which to draw.

Verily, looking out of the Library window, saw them approaching, and soliloquized.

"'Twill be a match, sure as eggs. Oh, Jehoram, could it only ha' been me and thee!"

CHAPTER XII

"Who vseth still the truth to tel
May blamèd be, though he saie wel:
Say Crowe is white and Snowe is black,
Lay not the fault on woman's back.
Thousands were good,
But few scapte drowning in Noe's Flood:
Most are wel bent—
I must saie so, least I be shent."
A Warning to Wooers.

LADY MANWOOD sat frowning over a note in her hand, if a slight pucker in the brow may be called a frown; for she was a woman of unquenchable amiability, and her face was set in an almost invariable smile. Someone, in her early youth, had remarked in her hearing that this smile was extremely charming, and she had acted upon the information ever since. It had given her the cue to a successful career, and she had been able to avail herself of it without any special effort. Most women find a difficulty in appearing amiable at all times and seasons; to Lady Manwood it was the easiest thing in the world, the path of least resistance. Nobody had ever heard her utter an angry word, or show the faintest sign of petulance; nobody had ever seen her annoyed for more than five minutes. And nobody had ever known her fail to get her own way. She never demanded, never resisted, never struggled; appeared always to yield and sacrifice inclination. Yet she never swerved an inch, never gave in or compromised, but was unconditionally

victor. For the art of obtaining everything her heart desired amounted to genius in this sweet-looking lady, who had the happiest face and kindest manner that ever cloaked a will of iron.

Her companion, Miss Louisa Tucker, who sat opposite, carefully unpicking the valuable lace from one of Lady Manwood's costly gowns, did not look so happy as might have been expected from one who basked continually beneath such a melting smile. But as her salary did not depend upon her beatitude, she was merely concerned in maintaining an agreeable and obliging demeanour. To be free from sordid care and physical discomfort was to her, as to so many women in these later days, the only form of happiness she had ever known. She counted herself somewhat favoured by fortune—as things go in this world of outrageous contrasts.

"It is really most mysterious, Tucky," said Lady Manwood, still with the pucker in her brow. "Mr. de Paganel says he cannot come to-night, because he has a guest. A guest—think of it! Such a thing has never happened before at Paganel Garth in the whole course of my experience. I wonder who it can be!"

She read the letter again. It was couched in the stiff archaic English Godwin de Paganel ever employed, beginning, "Most honoured Lady," and ending, "your very obedient, humble servant." The style pleased her excessively, for she had a sentimental fancy, and loved to imagine herself a heroine of romance.

"I am *so* disappointed, Tucky," she murmured plaintively. "You know I have been looking forward to this evening ever since I met the dear man in

Warlock Wood last Friday, and he accepted my invitation to come and play piquet with me. What shall I do? Would you ask him to dine and bring his guest, if you were I?"

Lady Manwood had a very engaging way of asking her companion what she ought to do in certain circumstances, as if she were an innocent child depending on a superior mind for guidance. And Miss Tucker had soon learnt to give the answers required of her in a suitable manner.

"I should certainly do so," she rejoined promptly. "It would be a neighbourly act that, I am sure, Mr. de Paganel would appreciate."

"We should make a four, and might play whist," said Lady Manwood pensively, as if thinking the matter over, whereas she had fully decided to send the invitation, even before consulting Miss Tucker's opinion.

"Is not whist too modern for the gentleman?" suggested her companion. "I should very much doubt whether Mr. de Paganel knows any game of later date than quadrille."

"Which is a game I have always longed to learn!" exclaimed her ladyship, with enthusiasm. "I will write at once; but"—her arched brows were knitted again—"what about the girl, Tucky? There is no need to invite her too, as she is not yet out, is there?"

"Certainly not," replied Miss Tucker, with safe decision. "I am sure her father would prefer that she should not be included. He has always expressed a *penchant* in favour of keeping the sweet virginal bloom of youth untarnished by contact with the outer world, and lamented the tendency of our day towards

too much freedom and lack of restraint. I think he is right myself."

She looked very prim. Lady Manwood made an effort to attain the same expression as she returned: "I agree entirely. It is quite shocking to see the way girls are brought up nowadays. If mine had lived, I should have endeavoured to train them according to Mr. de Paganel's ideal of perfect maidenly bloom and reserve." And she sighed softly.

Two children had been born to the little lady during the first part of her wedded life, and both had succumbed to infantile complaints at a very early age, having little vitality from the first. She had suffered acutely enough at the loss of them, being essentially a mother, but hers was no nature to suffer long or deeply, and the memory of them now gave her nothing but a mild regret. Indeed, she found the two tiny ghosts convenient pegs upon which to pose her womanly tenderness for the admiration of her fellows, and comfortable subjects for the exercise of her emotional faculties.

Miss Tucker had her own opinion as to the way in which Lady Manwood would have trained up her daughters, but she did not disclose it. Her answer to the last speech was on another line.

"Miss de Paganel bids fair to be pretty," she observed, "but she will never be as handsome as her father. In all my life I do not think I have ever seen a man so extremely good-looking as he is."

"Ah, you naughty girl! I fear I have a rival in you!" cried Lady Manwood, laughing. She made no secret of her design upon her neighbour, and the companion was fully in her confidence. "I see I must beware of you," she continued gaily. "We poor widows stand a poor chance against you single damsels."

Miss Tucker smiled grimly. She did not resent the mild satire of this speech, since it safeguarded her chief interest in life. She was well aware that her personal unattractiveness endeared her to her employer more than anything else about her. Albeit the most self-assured of women, Lady Manwood's complacency would never have brooked the slightest competition in the matter of charm. To the fact that she was not charming Miss Tucker owed her present engagement, and she did not intend to emperil it by taking offence at trifles.

She often wondered vaguely whether Lady Manwood's obvious self-satisfaction arose from an innate belief in her own beauty and power of attraction, or existed independently of that belief; whether it was deeply ingrained, or partly assumed for the purpose of imposing her will on others. Rarely a day passed but her ladyship lamented her own plainness and signs of increasing age, but Miss Tucker surmised that these lamentations were mere angling baits for flattery, and no essential part of the widow's intimate conviction. The pains she took to dress becomingly, the money she spent upon her person, the hours she sat before her glass, suggested that she deemed her face and figure worthy of much time and attention, as a woman rarely does who counts herself among the plain. Miss Tucker, for example, seldom glanced at her own reflection, having long since accepted as a fact that it was not worth troubling about; though her features were more regular, her hair longer and thicker, her eyes of a steadier hue, and her skin less dull than Lady Manwood's. But she lacked the supreme quality of self-confidence that can make a plain person beautiful, and an ugly one charming.

Lady Manwood, on the other hand, possessed this sublime confidence to a remarkable degree, and it had assisted her winning smile to carve her way in life. Without fortune, station, prestige, striking beauty, or aid from her relations, she had managed to capture Sir Roger Manwood before she had reached her twenty-second birthday, and to establish herself in a position from which she could look down on all her friends and kindred. The Baronet was a man of broad acres, the Baronetcy one of the oldest in England. His first wife had been an Earl's daughter, and when she died he resolved not to marry again, but to devote himself to her son, his heir. How could he know that there was in his vicinity the daughter of a poor professional man, one Lucy Leigh, whose heart he must either break (according to her own showing), or take to his bosom. His conscience was tender, his fancy was taken; he liked the notion of lifting a good little pauper out of her low condition, and so he married her—or, to be quite accurate, allowed her to marry him.

She told everyone it was a love-match, and so it was, on her side. So it would have been had she married any other, for little Lucy Leigh had never experienced the slightest difficulty in loving anyone she wished, or thought it desirable, to love. Some women are made thus. They can love as easily as they can sleep. So she married the good-hearted Baronet, bore him two girls (no more was needed of her, since his son was immensely robust), petted and adored him openly, never disagreed with him outwardly, never seemed to cross his wishes—and followed her own way with an aim as unswerving as an arrow's flight.

When he died, five years later, she put on the deepest mourning, and was inconsolable for several months.

But she never forgot to touch her sallow cheeks with faint bloom and powder, never omitted to wave her hair, even in the earliest throes of grief; and before the year was out she had begun to tone her sable weeds with a becoming amount of filmy white. At the time this chronicle begins she had been a widow two years, and was reluctant to remain so. She had therefore begun to cultivate an ardent passion, which she had confided to Miss Tucker under pledge of solemn secrecy. Lady Manwood meant to marry again, and the object of her choice was Mr. Godwin de Paganel.

In her own language, she was "consumed by a devouring but hopeless attachment." In the language of Miss Tucker's unuttered thought, the lady had determined to find a new husband and home before Christopher, Sir Roger's son, should want to bring a wife to Oakwood Hall. It is true that Paganel Garth was crumbling to pieces, and that Godwin de Paganel had no wherewithal to restore it. But Lady Manwood had a comfortable jointure of her own; she admired de Paganel, and he was close at hand. Moreover, even if his house were crumbling its shelter would be preferable to that of the small dower-house which was all she could actually call her own. And the strange old place appealed to her romantic fancy almost as much as did its handsome owner.

The invitation despatched to Paganel Garth, Lady Manwood began to make preparations for the expected guests. A dainty dinner must be prepared, and many details considered.

"Take these books, Tucky," she said, "and hide them somewhere. You know Mr. de Paganel cannot bear the sight of a modern novel."

Miss Tucker knew. She was aware also that the

volumes in question were a collection of such pithless sentimental works as are to be found *ad nauseam* in all libraries, a stream of nothingness in which Lady Manwood continually laved herself. The companion, who enjoyed something more literary, and had once attended University Extension Lectures, smiled rather grimly to herself as she stowed these books in out-of-the-way corners. She could in imagination hear her employer cooing to Mr. de Paganel about the deterioration of literature, and agreeing with him in his censure of vulgar taste.

After lunch she had to read aloud to Lady Manwood from a book she had recently bought because Mr. de Paganel had casually mentioned it—Malory's translation of the *Morte d'Arthur*. Not that her ladyship cared for it, but she thought it would prepare her mind for discourse with her hoped-for guest, and give her something to talk of with him. She kept awake all through the short but interesting account of Sir Launcelot du Lake's deliverance of a lady who, "all naked as a needle," had been for many winters boiled in scalding water, owing to the malignity of Queen Morgan le Fay; but her ejaculations of "How quaint! How charming!" grew rarer as the tale of the dolorous lady gave place to one anent the slaying of a dragon "horrible and fiendly"; and, before reaching the thrilling account of Sir Launcelot's deception of King Peleas with regard to his daughter, Lady Manwood was slumbering profoundly. Miss Tucker continued reading for her own benefit, with maidenly blushes and a sweet sense of vicarious impropriety, the strange adventures of Sir Bors and other knights in various risky situations, and had just finished the emphatic declaration of Sir Ector that "never before this time was

there never no manner of knight the which wounded and hurt me so dangerously as thou," when a servant entered bearing a note, and Lucy Manwood roused herself with great alacrity to read it.

"They are coming!" she cried exultantly. "I dared hardly hope he would accept, my heart so wished it, and now I feel quite nervous. Let us have tea now, Tucky dear, and thank you for reading to me so beautifully. Your soft voice made me feel quite sleepy. But I do love that quaint old English; don't you? How lovely it must have been to live in those dear old days, with everything so romantic and enchanting!"

Miss Tucker recognized this expression as a rehearsal, and therefore did not feel called upon to make any rejoinder. She knew she should hear the same remarks again later.

CHAPTER XIII

" His maner was an heven for to see,
To any woman, were she never so wise ;
So painted he, and kempt, at point devise,
As wel his wordes as his countenance."

Chaucer.

In all her thirty-eight years of drab-coloured life Louisa Tucker had never enjoyed an evening more than the one she spent in the society of Mr. Ivo Newman. After dinner, a meal that passed off smoothly, and with only so much restraint as the courtly manner of Mr. de Paganel imposed, Lady Manwood led him into her conservatory to look at the new bloom of a valuable orchid, and therein they remained for an hour or more, during which time Mr. Newman improved the shining hour and his own position. It was his policy to make friends, and to discover the geography of the metaphorical ground upon which he found himself. In his long conversation with Miss Tucker he learnt much that he wanted to know.

He adopted towards her an attitude that was entirely distinct from any she had experienced before in her rare contact with the opposite sex—a mixture of confidential boldness, adroit flattery, and implied esteem, both for her mind and person, that flew to the gentle spinster's head like new wine. Once or twice she even began to suspect that he might be trying to flirt with her, a suspicion founded on ignorance, but not without

its thrill, and it is much to her credit that she did not allow it to overturn her common sense and render her skittish. But although she could suppress, with arch primness, her own enjoyment of the situation new to her, she was not proof against the skill of his probing or able to conceal how the land lay in certain quarters.

Among other disclosures she admitted that Lady Manwood intended to marry Godwin de Paganel. This they discussed at length.

"But he is a pauper!" exclaimed Newman.

"She has money," answered Miss Tucker.

"I thought the stepson inherited the bulk of the property."

"He owns the house and estate, but Sir Roger settled on her a large income, and, of course, there is the Dower House, a pleasant little place, though her ladyship does not think so."

"Where is the young man now? I suppose he is young?"

"Nearly thirty—young for a man. He is living in London chambers at present. A perfect crank on science, his stepmother says. If he were not, I suppose he would come home and look after his domain, instead of letting her live here and do exactly as she likes."

"Are they on good terms?" Newman inquired.

"Perfectly. Lady Manwood is always on good terms with everybody," was the answer, given with a grain of sarcasm. "She has never been known to quarrel with anybody in her life. There has been no need."

"I do not quite understand——"

"Everything goes down before her; she always achieves her purpose without apparent effort. You

see, she has no corners, no sharp edges; she simply glides on her way unimpeded."

Ivo Newman laughed. "I cannot decide whether Nature intended you for a barrister or a psychological novelist, Miss Tucker," he said, "but as either you would have made your mark, for you read character marvellously; I would add, dangerously. I wonder what you will say of me when I am gone."

"I am wondering too," she replied.

"Then you have not drawn your conclusions yet?"

"No—and yes. I know you are a man of the world, and a clever one. I am only uncertain why you are here."

"I have told you"—he smiled again—"about the literary compilation I am making."

"Yes; but it is not that which brought you here," she said.

He was more startled than he would show. A certain dread of her clear vision set his quick wits to work for a means of keeping her under his hand, and binding her to his interests.

"You are quite right," he said. "I have another reason for being here. If I entrust you with it, will you hold my confession sacred?"

He laid his hand on hers, and pressed it as he spoke. There was fire in the dark eyes that looked into hers, and her withered heart fluttered a little.

"You may trust me," she said stiffly, because the more she felt, the stiffer became her manner.

"Then you shall know all, but not now. I can only say now that I am here for no harm, but rather for the benefit of Mr. de Paganel and his fortunes. I am pledged to secrecy for a short time, or I could hold nothing from you. Do you believe in friendship?"

"Surely!" she ejaculated in surprise.

"Between man and woman, I mean?"

The question did not seem trite to Miss Tucker, but came upon her with the force of an original problem. She mused a little, and then replied that she did not know, she was not sure.

Whereupon Newman launched forth into all the jargon about Platonic friendship with which most women are so familiar nowadays. He discoursed upon the feminine advice and sympathy which all men need, the masculine tenderness and support which all women need. He took her senses with his bold impassioned eyes; he conquered her intelligence with apt phrases, and her reasoning power with specious plausibility. Finally he begged her to allow him to be her friend, and if he had asked to be her lover she could not have felt more flattered and confused. Yet she bore herself with some dignity, even in her coy consent, and had he not been an adept in reading woman's weakness even under her best cloak of reserve, he might have felt uneasy. But he knew her subjugated by the quiver of her eyelids, her rising colour, and fluttering breath. And as he pressed her hand tenderly at parting, he said in a low voice:

"I count on your discretion. Trust me till we meet again."

What woman does not love a secret? Louisa Tucker smiled in her sleep that night, and next day also, for no apparent reason. And the smile was neither grim nor sarcastic, as it had so often been before.

Lady Manwood felt that this evening had advanced her *affaire de cœur* to a stage bordering on ripeness. She confided as much to her dear Tucky before retiring that night.

"He spoke, oh, so pathetically! about his poverty and loneliness," she cried. "And he betrayed that his heart yearned for a woman's sympathy. Of course, the chit, though she is a good chit enough, can neither console nor comprehend such a sensitive and refined soul as his. He needs a wife, Tucky, and he *almost* said so. Such a husband as he could be, too!" She sighed deeply, and for once Louisa sighed with her, for she was in a sentimental mood rare to her.

When the two men found themselves outside, and Ivo Newman had lighted a long-desired cigar, he observed:

"I have never met a more charming lady."

Mr. de Paganel did not at once reply, but as they turned into the road he said:

"I believe Mistress Tucker to be a most amiable and gentle creature, but——"

Newman interrupted with a laugh.

"My dear sir, I admit that Lady Manwood's wine was good, but it has not affected me so far as to see in that angular spinster a charming lady!" he scoffed.

"Sir, your words offend me," said Godwin de Paganel, frowning. "To speak thus coarsely of a gentlewoman who hath no protector, is, in mine eyes, unworthy of a man of honour."

Newman saw that once again he had afflicted the fastidious taste of his companion, and hastened to make amends.

"You are entirely right," he declared, "and there is no man living who theoretically bows the knee to womanhood more humbly than I. But I have the misfortune to live in an age when woman demands, not chivalry, but equality. The men of my day are con-

cerned less in protecting woman than in protecting themselves against her."

"I am happy in that I do not live in your day," said de Paganel significantly. "An age in which man seeks to protect himself against woman must be a weak and dastardly age."

Upon that pronouncement, which Newman greeted with an agreeable laugh, a long silence fell between them, and they walked on in the moonlight, each chewing the cud of his own thoughts.

Presently Mr. de Paganel said dreamily, as if to himself: "She is, certes, a very sweet-tongued and worshipful lady."

"All the freshness of a country girl and *savoir faire* of a grande dame," Newman replied to him promptly. "And I suppose she is a great lady, in point of fact, since I have heard that she is wealthy."

"Her fortune doth not concern me," said de Paganel stiffly, "and I must protest that wealth doth not make a great lady. I believe she was of humble birth."

"And that is the reason she adores a great gentleman," quoth Newman, with a side glance.

"I fail to comprehend your meaning, sir," Mr. de Paganel frowned again. "It hath not come to my knowledge that Lady Manwood adores any man. If you have the honour to be in her confidence, I prithee respect it."

"It is perfectly obvious to all who have eyes to see that Lady Manwood adores the Master of Paganel Garth," spoke Newman, with courage; "and although I have not the honour you speak of, sir, I make no doubt but another has her confidence—one who watches the development of this romantic affair with great interest."

"The 'romantic affair' existeth but in your imagination," replied the Master of Paganel Garth coldly, but there was a certain note in that coldness betokening a thaw, as Newman detected with inward satisfaction.

"You credit me with a gift I do not possess," he returned. "Imagination was never my strong point, dear sir. But when a fair lady's infatuation is so plain for all to see, who can be blamed for seeing? She makes, indeed, no attempt to conceal it. And she is so fair and charming that it seems a pity the gentleman in question can make no response to her devotion."

"You are mistaken, sir. The gentleman in question doth make full response to the lady's—gracious kindness; the devotion is rather on his side. But he hath naught else to offer, and his esteem for her is too great to permit his laying a fallen estate at her feet—a name unknown at Court, a crumbling house, a spent life. The race of de Paganel is sped, and the name must die with the last scion of it. So dieth every name in time. I am content to have it expire not in dishonour."

> "'And the Devil laughed, for his darling sin
> Is the pride that apes humility,'"

quoted Newman under his breath.

"I crave your pardon," said his host.

I merely remarked, sir, that a certain brand of numility much resembles pride."

"My pride is all that is left to me," observed de Paganel sadly.

"That and . . . *that*."

They had reached a gate into the meadow which ran up to what had once been the moat of Paganel Garth, and from which a clear view of the old house could be seen, its blunt Tudor gables silvered in the moonlight.

As Newman pointed to it, with his musical but mocking laugh, Godwin de Paganel exclaimed in a tone of amazement :

"Mother of Heaven! Who is in the Library so late? Behold a light there, and the hour past midnight!"

"Your daughter has probably seized the opportunity of your absence to steal a few hours with her favourite books," suggested Ivo.

But even as he spoke something like a cold dew seemed to gather at his temples. For the light that filtered through the chinks in the closed shutters of the Library window had an unnatural, even unearthly, gleam, and bore no resemblance to that diffused by the yellow oil-lamps which were the only means of illumination in the ancient house. De Paganel noted this also, and he muttered, with fixed eyes staring across the meadow: "Strange! wondrous strange! I like it not."

"The moonlight is very strong," said Newman, with a slight catch in his breath. "It gives a queer look to the most normal things. Shall we go on, and surprise Miss Millicent at her reading?"

"Ay," murmured de Paganel, as if in a dream, and for some while they walked silently, each pondering vainly and cudgelling his mind to give a reason upon which to base the deathly green light he had seen issuing from the Library window. They reached the iron gates very soon, and Godwin de Paganel drew forth the ponderous key from within his long, old-fashioned redingote, to unlock the side entrance. Ivo Newman shuddered as he went through. The Court-yard was in pitch darkness, save for a dim lantern that Verily had placed under one of the archways. Taking it up,

Godwin de Paganel led the way to the stairway, and so to the massive door which, in its turn, yielded to a key from the recesses of his coat. Without a word they threaded the echoing stone passages, and crossed the dark hall to the Library, the pale glimmer of the lantern throwing their monstrous shadows upon floor and wainscot. At the door they both paused abruptly, for through the keyhole a thin wisp of light issued and lay in a small pear-shaped spot upon the wall opposite—the same greenish light they had seen across the meadow. Godwin de Paganel turned to his companion, who disguised a shiver in an affected shrug of the shoulders.

"What shall we find here?" he whispered. Then, with a transparent effort of valour, he flung open the door and stepped into the room.

The Library was in utter darkness, and its ghostly inhabited silence seemed to strike them both in the face.

De Paganel backed out, closing the door as suddenly as he had opened it.

"You have seen!" he said in a hushed voice, crossing himself mechanically. "Where death reigns no natural laws avail. It is as I thought. Let us to bed, for I am weary—and cold."

In his chamber Ivo Newman swore a good round oath, and unearthed a bottle of brandy from his leathern bag, for his teeth were chattering.

"A little more of this business and I clear out," he muttered. "This is my first experience of a haunted house, and I shall take precious good care it is the last. I have never believed in ghosts—but—what the devil was it?"

A long sigh seemed to fill the room as he spoke,

followed by a creak at the door. He strode across to it—tried to open it. The door was fastened. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

"Again! I'll be damned!" he cried.

Surely a faint laugh echoed down the corridor outside! Or was it the light April breeze? He swore again, and betook himself under the bedclothes with speed.

CHAPTER XIV

"Her body is sweet, and the face of her
Take my heart as in a snare.
Loyal love is but her share
That is so sweet."

Aucassin and Nicolete.

OVER the dreaming stillness of the garden the moon rose attended by the evening star, blue-tinted and serene as herself, filling the fragrant air with enchantment, and making poetry of common things. For this is the magic hour in the daily pageant, when the sun has fallen to sleep in his pillows of rosy cloud, and the pale moon glides up like a spirit to take his place, and keep watch over the world. There is a purity and loveliness over the earth then that seems to rouse some hidden spring of tenderness in human hearts, and with strange necromantic power calls up the wraiths of memory.

Melisent de Paganel glanced out of the window at the opal sky, and, taking Pearl in her arms, left her lace-pillow. She strayed about the garden, noting with keen joy all the improvements made in it by Swithun already, and finally her fancy led her to the old Rose Pleasaunce. She had reclaimed there from disorder four beds of earth which she called Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, growing in each the flowers of its season, and now the paths were beginning to show amid the jungle of bryony, deadly

nightshade, ivy, and bramble that had hidden them, and the ancient sundial had been released from the thicket surrounding it. She never came near the dial without rubbing its weather-stained face, and she did so now, mechanically, as she stood beside it in the moonlight, while a nightingale sang passionately in a tree close by, and Pearl chased a white moth at her feet, looking like the phantom of a cat, and as silent, as he flitted over the grass.

Around and about her flower-beds the old rose-trees had straggled for many years, unrestrained and uncared for. They gave but few blossoms with their exuberant foliage, and those of a single and briar-like form, but she treasured them exceedingly. As she was standing there now a new aspect of the rosery struck her eyes, and she realized, with a glad surprise, that the Gardener had taken the old bushes in hand. They had been boldly cut down, the hard earth loosened at their feet, where had been laid some of that magic fertilizer to which both she and Swithun pinned their unquestioning faith.

"Ah, Pearl, Pearl!" she cried aloud, catching up the white cat in her arms with sudden rapture, "is he not the Good Fairy of the garden?" and then, raising her face from the soft fur in which she had buried it, she saw the same Good Fairy rise up before her from the hither side of the sundial, his hands full of weeds, his uncovered head silvered by the moonshine. They looked at each other in silence for some instants, as if a spell had been woven about them.

Swithun was the first to speak.

"Forgive me if I startled you. I have been trying to get some order out of chaos here. We ought to have a few more rose-blooms after my pruning and mulcting,

and the old stocks can be budded in the autumn. Until you spoke I did not hear your approach."

"And small wonder. The nightingale's music drowns aught else. It is almost a sin to be talking and not hearkening to such a heavenly song."

A shower of crystal drops seemed to fall through the white air as she spoke. They both drew breath to listen, and Swithun felt once more the trance-like state creep over him. For, standing there, with parted lips, in the ethereal light, against a background of dark trees, Melisent looked to him like an emanation of light from the moon rather than human. He had to give himself a shake, and as he did so his eyes fell on the disc of the sundial.

"'Fayre houres flie,
Ye al shal die,"

he quoted, making talk to break the spell upon his senses. "Short and pithy, certainly; one cannot complain of too many words here. A sermon in a nutshell."

"I love the old rhyme," said Melisent softly, her voice subdued to an accompaniment of the nightingale. "It is like a little chime of silver bells calling to holy thoughts."

Swithun started, almost gasped. The word 'rhyme' struck his consciousness with all the force of a revelation, and he was plunged suddenly into thought. But the puzzled look of Melisent's eyes fixed upon his face recalled him to his surroundings.

"What is it, Swithun?" she asked. "Why do you look so strange?"

"Not I, madam; it is your fancy," he answered lightly. "I was but thinking what few words are

needed in a sermon, and how many are used! Here, I take it, there are not more than thirty letters all told, and yet how much the dial says."

Melisent began to count the letters, touching each one with the dainty tip of her forefinger.

"Twenty-six letters only," she said; "even less than you thought, Swithun—a truth, a poem, and a sermon in twenty-six letters. Think of it!"

Swithun was indeed thinking hard, with a heart that beat fiercely, as he said to himself: "Twenty-six letters—the letters of the alphabet. Eureka! Why has it never struck me before?"

But he uttered no word of this aloud, and Melisent went on, after a short pause:

"How often," she said, "my forefather, Ansculf de Paganel must have stood where we are standing now, musing upon the words of the old dial. Did he ever wonder whether the hand of Time would reveal his Secret to the world, or whether it would be buried in oblivion for ever?"

Swithun scrutinized her closely, wondering at these words, which chimed so well with his own reflections. "The Secret!" he ejaculated. "Ah, but is there such a Secret, or is it not merely legend, with no foundation in fact?" He hoped by this to rouse some further knowledge, and the ruse was successful.

"But, indeed, there is foundation in fact," Melisent protested indignantly. "The Secret is no legend; we de Paganels have always known of it, though we know not what it is. And there are documents——"

She paused. He was wise enough to curb impatience and the thirst for knowledge that consumed him, interrogating her only with his eyes.

"My father hath them concealed in a hidden drawer

of a cabinet where he holds all private things," she went on, "but he cannot read them; no man can. For they are writ in a cipher to which none hath the key. My father tried to make sense out of the jumbled letters in vain, and then I did try, with no better fortune, although I copied sundry lines out on paper, and searched among the old books for the meaning thereof many days."

Swithun's eyes flashed with sudden light as he asked: "And have you kept that paper?"

She reflected. "I think I did place them in one of the old books, when I was seeking the meaning of the words. Yes—I do remember. It was either in the pages of Paracelsus, or *De Magia Veterum*, or *The Mirrour of Alchemy*. I am almost sure it is in *The Mirrour of Alchemy*, because that was the book I had last. Shall we go to the Library and see?"

"Nothing would please me so much," he declared emphatically.

The air was chilly in these first Spring days, and Melisent gave a little shiver as she wound through the alleys of the garden, between the tall hedges of yew and box that Swithun had begun to cut and hack into reasonable size, so that the sun could reach their paths of moss, damp and spongy in continual shade. Thrush and blackbird had quite ceased fluting now, and the corncrake's melancholy rattle had begun in the meadow beyond the moat, from which a pearly mist came stealing. The old house stood out grimly black in the wan light, its gables and large square chimneys clearly cut against the sky as if painted on it in printers' ink. Melisent paused on the terrace, and turned to Swithun:

"What doth it remind you of?" she said.

"The Enchanted Castle where the Sleeping Beauty lay dreaming," he answered promptly.

She faced about and led into the house. It was inevitable that the end of the story should come into both their minds at once, and he—had he not already begun to cut his way through the tangle of brushwood that surrounded the sleeping castle?

CHAPTER XV

"Lovely kind and kindly loving,
Such a mind were worth the moving:
Truly fair and fairly true—
Where are all these but in you?

"Wisely kind and kindly wise,
Blessèd life, where such love lies!
Wise and kind and fair and true—
Lovely live all these in you.

"Sweetly dear and dearly sweet,
Blessèd where these blessings meet!
Sweet, fair, wise, kind, blessèd, true—
Blessèd be all these in you!"

Nicholas Breton.

THE paper which Melisent sought was in *The Mirrour of Alchemy*. She took it from the brown stained pages of the book and handed it to Swithun, who scanned it eagerly, the warm colour of hope and expectation mounting under his bronze skin as he did so.

It was exactly what he had anticipated, a jumble of letters thrown in apparently senseless gibberish, in which a few real words were formed here and there—words he recognized as belonging to the old Hermetic symbolism: 'Red Lion,' 'Green Lion,' 'Old Lion,' 'Flying Eagle,' 'Flower of the Lily,' 'Flower of the Air,' and other fantastic terms. He gloated over them with hungry eyes.

"The words here are all used in the books of Alchemy," said Melisent, looking over his shoulder; "and they mean, as I have heard, certain metals or

chemicals. But that is all I have ever been able to discover. I do not know their meaning. Do you know aught of Alchemy?"

"I know," he replied, "that the Philosopher's Stone was something more than an agent by which to convert dross into gold, that the philosophers who made it their study were the true scientists of their day, and held nobler ambitions than many of our modern ones. They were, moreover, the first evolutionists, believing that, just as gold, the highest metal, has been evolved by the patient processes of Nature from the whole mineral kingdom, so man, last product of the animal kingdom, possesses wonderful latent powers of self-development that shall one day give him the mastery over life and death. But this will not interest you."

"Indeed—indeed," she protested, "it doth interest me greatly. I have already gleaned so much from the old books that I would fain know more. And were not many of the Alchemists good and holy men?"

"The true Alchemists were, undoubtedly, for they maintained that Nature would yield up her secrets only to the pure in heart, and they had as profound a scorn for the charlatan who affected to transmute gold out of base metals and filth as any scientist of to-day could feel. As usual with every great idea, Alchemy was vulgarized by the quacks and humbugs, who but dimly apprehended the real object of this much-abused science. But the true men based all hope of success on living a chaste and devout life."

"All that you say," cried Melisent, who had kept her eyes steadily fixed upon his face all the while he had been speaking, "only serves to show a reason why Ansculf de Paganel was such a good and great

man; for he was good, Swithun, as well as wise. He gave to the poor and needy, living himself as simply as any Begging Friar. He interfered not with State matters nor in troubles of the Church; and, although a Catholic at heart, he yet imposed not his belief on others. The Priest he kept as private chaplain ministered to him only, while his household followed the new faith—those who wished to do so. All this is history. No bigot, no roysterer, a kind husband and father, he was, nevertheless, suspected of dealings with Satan, and his house violated by minions of the law, searching for some sign of unlawful practices that would condemn him. They found nothing, no magic or devilry, by which they could destroy him. Yet to this day his fair name lies under the ban of sorcery—once the most loathed word in the language, and even now of evil sound. Why did God permit this injustice to His servant?"

Swithun made no attempt to answer this query or solve the great problem that lies at the back of it.

"The New Idea," he said, "must always appear to the ignorant as a monstrous Chimera, to be fought against and persecuted. Its possessor, or he who is possessed by it, is generally accounted a madman."

"Give me such madness!" exclaimed Melisent. "I would liefer have it than the wisdom of the dull-brained and timid."

"And so would I," echoed Swithun, smiling; "but, all the same, there is something to be said for the established as against the iconoclastic. Lyly wrote, 'Experience is the Mistress of Fooles;' but the world at large is bound to go upon experience as a basis, and all innovation is more or less iconoclastic. Thus, experience having taught that man is chiefly guided

by self-interest, by the lust of power and property, it was perfectly natural to assume that the Alchemists wished to manufacture gold for their own purposes. And if coining has ever been a punishable offence against the State, how much more so would private gold-making be? But I am convinced, by a very close study of the question, that it was no mere desire for lucre that inspired the labours of the Alchemists—the real Alchemists."

"What, think you, did the true Alchemists desire?" asked Melisent.

"They sought the way towards a greater knowledge of the hidden things of Nature. Inductive science was unknown to them, but they focussed minute observation on all the facts available, and arrived at certain deductions, upon which they founded a materio-spiritual philosophy. And they hoped for two results from the discovery of the so-called Philosopher's Stone: On the one hand to make gold so common that it would cease to be valuable and a temptation to men; on the other hand, to arrive at a state of knowledge which would enable them to solve the problem of good and evil, and regenerate mankind. In short, they believed their Great Idea to be a veritable Elixir of Life in the best sense—spiritual life and life everlasting."

"But, surely, they believed also that they could free the world from death by their potent Elixir," said Melisent. "I have ever thought so, and wished I could come by some for my father."

"It is difficult to know," replied Swithun thoughtfully, "how far they really believed in the virtue of such a potion as actually able to arrest decay of the body. Some of them did, no doubt. But their sym-

bolism was so profound and cryptic that it is nearly impossible to penetrate it. However, it is clear to anyone who has studied their works that they did not attach ordinary meanings to the words and phrases they used. For example, gold to them was not what it means to us—merely a metal from which money is coined—but a trinity of precious elements, which they divided into Astral Gold, whose centre is the sun, and whose light is communicated to all beings ; Elementary Gold, the most pure and determined part of all substances, a particle of which is contained in every creature ; and, lastly, Vulgar Gold, the most perfect and unchangeable of metals. Of course, they were mystics and metaphysicians to a degree we can hardly comprehend to-day ; but it is strange that men are beginning to ponder once more upon the links that lie between the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms, while a belief in an Astral Fluid as the source of life is held by many of this generation who are neither foolish nor over-credulous ; a belief to which several of the later discoveries of science have lent some colour."

At the close of this long speech—the longest Melisent had ever heard from him—Swithun's eyes had grown black with an expression she was learning to understand. It meant that she had faded out of his consciousness as a *woman*, and was there only as a *listener*. But the expression passed as he became aware of the perplexity and uneasiness of her gaze. She spoke gravely, and with displeasure in her tone.

" You are no ignorant man, as you told me," she said gravely. " You have deceived me, Swithun, for you are very learned, and you fright me with your learning."

He bit his lip, and sought for a plausible lie with which to ease her mind without doing violence to his conscience, but none would come. She continued in a low voice:

"You have deceived me. I wonder why, and why you are here. Unless you tell me truly, I must have you go away. There is something I do not understand. What is it?"

"I swear to you," said Swithun, "that my purpose in coming here is no evil one, and that I have spoken the truth when I told you I came to learn. I will confess that I am less ignorant than I professed to you at first, but I am still ignorant of much that I would know, and that I can learn only by being here. Will you dismiss me because I am not so poor and ignorant as you thought, and have given thought to other things besides gardening? Have I not done my work well? Have I refused any service you asked of me? But if you doubt that I am your loyal servant, if you believe me capable of such rank ingratitude as to take advantage of your goodness and innocence, I will go at once, for I could no longer bear to remain under such a suspicion. You must think me a knave."

"No, no!" exclaimed Melisent hastily; "but——" She paused in much distress.

At that moment Pearl, who had leaped in through the open window, came to rub his head against the Gardener's leather-clad legs. Swithun stooped and lifted the soft creature in his arms, where he lay and blinked contentedly. Never before had Pearl allowed a man to touch him without much protest, not even Godwin de Paganel himself. The cloud faded from Melisent's brow, and she smiled, saying: "How the little one loves thee!"

As soon as he heard the pronoun Swithun knew himself safe.

"Pearl *trusts* me," he said, with a reproachful look at her, and her black lashes fell on reddening cheeks.

"And I do trust thee also, Swithun," she said, with such sweet humility of tone that he felt abashed, and could have fallen at her feet.

They were both presently so much engrossed in the treasures of the Library that they did not hear Verily enter. She stood at the door, with eyes more like half-moons than ever, and her voice rang like a cracked glass bell as she cried:

"What! here, Mistress! Good lack! and I have sought thee everywhere—i' the garden, the Dame's Parlour, and thy chamber—only to find thee here with the Gardener. What doth he in this place? Methought the lessons were not till after supper."

"I am showing Swithun some of our old books, Verily, my father being away," said Melisent, with dignity. "And we will sup here to-night all together, to save thee the trouble of setting two meals," she concluded, turning back to the book she was showing.

Verily's brows made inroads into her hair.

"All sup together!" she ejaculated, in a tone verging on horror. "Sup with the Gardener, Mistress! I warrant no lady of your house ever did so before."

"Then I will set the fashion," said Melisent, laughing somewhat nervously. "Do as I bid, Verily, and look not so shocked." Coming to the door, she laid her arm round the spinster's broad shoulders, and, pushing her gently out, murmured in her ear: "Do ye not see he is no common gardener man? Leave thy Honey to know what is meet, and question not. My father need not know."

Verily grunted, and went grumbling audibly down the stone passage. Any change in the order of things disturbed her tidy soul, and for a lady to sit at table with a serving-man seemed to her conventional prejudices a monstrous and degrading innovation. Her face proclaimed convinced displeasure as she laid the table, and the glances she cast from time to time at Swithun were intended to pierce him with shame.

They were, however, entirely lost upon the young man, whose whole attention was absorbed in the volumes upon which he pored.

"Why, here—here," he exclaimed, "is surely a first edition of the *Boke of the Lion!* It must be worth a fortune!"

"Nay, it is but a fragment. My father says 'twas writ by Chaucer, and is one of the lost works; but it is not perfect; there are many pages missing, as you see."

Swithun gazed in a kind of rapture at the queer black-letter volume he held in his hand.

"It is really dangerous to have it lying here loose," he declared. "It should be under lock and key. I marvel it has not been stolen before now. Is it possible your father does not know its value?"

"I think he does," replied Melisent. "But as no one ever enters the Library but my father, Verily, and I, what danger can there be?"

"It would be a good thing," chimed in Verily here, "if the Master could be persuaded to sell some of them musty old books that are not fit for Christian reading, and are worth such a mort o' money. And then, maybe, his lady daughter wouldn't ha' to work so hard, and could go out into the world among her equals, instead o' having to cotton to all sorts and sundries as come along."

Swithun turned away to hide a smile; but Melisent frowned.

"You are speaking foolishly, Verily," she said; "for well you know I have no desire to go out into the world, and sooner than that my father should part with one of our dear and precious books I would live in a cell on bread and water all my days."

"I care not what ye say, Mistress. It is a sin and a shame that you, who are one of the first ladies in the land, so be in the matter of birth, should have to toil and moil like any poor cottage wench—not to speak of hobnobbing wi' gardeners and the like."

The cloud gathered on Melisent's brow, and she was seething towards a right royal anger when she met Swithun's eyes, which were brimming with laughter. Her own lips curved in an irrepressible smile as she said, with all the severity she could muster: "For shame, Verily, to speak thus rudely of one who cannot defend himself or retort upon you! And to speak of private matters to a stranger is unseemly. I am greatly displeased."

Poor Verily withered visibly beneath this rebuke, and the spoons she was laying upon the table rattled in her trembling hand. Swithun felt sorry for her, and came to the rescue as a gallant man should to a damsel in distress.

"If I may be forgiven, madam, I would say that Mrs. Verily is quite right," he said. (Heaven knows what instinct of tact made him give Verily the matronly title she so longed to possess.) "It is not at all suitable that you should hob and nob with working men like myself. I will go at once into the kitchen."

"You will do naught o' the kind," exclaimed Verily, in a tearful voice. "If the Mistress ha' bid ye sup wi'

her, sup ye shall—and there's an end to 't. Who are you, to say where ye'll sup—or me either, for the matter o' that? But if ever you speak abroad of the privy matters spoke of in this house, you will be the most double-dyed traitor as ever broke bread under a greenwood tree, and I care not who hears me say it."

Swithun assured her gravely that, sooner than commit such perfidy, he would tear his tongue out by the roots, and Verily declared she was satisfied. But Melisent still looked displeased, and her voice trembled somewhat as she said:

"I am not ashamed of working with my hands for gold to prop up our fallen house, or that others should know of it. I would a thousand times rather toil than have one book sold, one stick or stone of the old place go to strangers. But I would fain not be made an object of compassion to any man. That I choose to work at the loom and lace-pillow concerns me only, and no other person in the world."

The lift of the head, that was not a toss, but a free gesture of proud self-reliance peculiar to her, showed little of the girl, much of the spirited woman, with the blood of spirited ancestors in her veins. Some lines from *The Faerie Queene* he had learnt in his school-days floated into Swithun's mind as he caught the starry gleam of her heavily shaded eyes:

> "*In her faire face two living lampes did flame,*
> *Kindled above at th' heavenly maker's light,*
> *And darted fyrie beams out of the same,*
> *So passing persant, and so wondrous bright,*
> *That quite bereav'd the rash beholder's sight.*"

But the words he spoke did not betray the poetry of his thoughts.

"No man would ever dare to hold Miss de Paganel

as an object of compassion," he said, with great deference ; and Verily snorted :—

" I should think not, indeed."

Supper was laid, and Swithun comported himself with great humility at the table. There was some stiffness, owing to Verily's compressed lips and watery eyes ; but otherwise the meal passed off reasonably well. While it was in progression the young man asked if he might be so bold as to ask for a look at the Library Catalogue after supper, and Melisent replied that it did not possess one.

" There was one many years ago," she said ; " but it fell to pieces with long use, and now I do not even know where the loose sheets are."

Swithun looked very serious.

" But does not your father realize how very important it is to have a complete and correct catalogue ?" he asked. " How otherwise could he know if any book disappeared ?"

" But why should any book disappear ?" queried Melisent.

" They are valuable, and might well be robbed."

" But the shutters are closed and barred at night, and so are all the outside gates and doors. How could a robber enter without making himself heard ?"

" There are other ways of entering a house than by breaking in through barred doors," suggested Swithun. " One way is through bringing a letter of introduction."

Melisent and Verily flashed a message across from eyes to eyes, and Verily exclaimed with some asperity :

" And one way is to take the post of gardener."

" True," retorted Swithun calmly ; " but if I wanted to rob the Library I should scarcely warn Miss de Paganel against myself. It would naturally be my object to lull, rather than rouse, her suspicions."

"You think Mr. Newman——" Melisent began, and stopped.

"I think it would be well to learn how much the Earl of Darchester knows about him, and to make a catalogue of all the valuable books in the Library at once," replied Swithun firmly.

"It is true," mused Melisent aloud, "that I did see him fingering *The Romaunt of the Rose*, as if he would fain guess its value; and I know he hath no love of books for their own sake. But could it be——oh, Swithun, you frighten me! My father trusts him, and he is a man—he should know who is trustworthy."

"Humph!" Verily pouted. "The Master knows as much about men as I of playing the spinet, for that matter."

"But, of course, you have a key to the door," said Swithun. "It can be locked at night, and in the day your father is always here."

"There is no key—naught but a bolt," said Melisent; and there was an uncomfortable pause in the conversation, broken by Verily, who began to rattle the plates on the table, saying brusquely:—

"The Library did very well, and lost none of its books before Master Swithun came. I warrant it can do without his interference."

"Verily is in an ill mood to-night," said Melisent as the latter clattered out of the room; "in sooth, I know not what ails her. But you are quite right, Swithun. It is proper to have a catalogue of the books, for then we should learn if any were taken. I will myself begin to make one this very night, and maybe you will lend your aid."

He was glad to do so, and they lost no time, though he eyed with longing eyes many of the books whose

titles only he had time to catch. Verily did not disturb them till eleven o'clock, when she called out the hour in a sepulchral voice at the door, like an ancient Charley, and the Catalogue was reluctantly put away, to be finished another time, for Mr. de Paganel and Newman might return any moment.

"That young man," said Verily, when Swithun had gone off, with Pearl, to his place of rest—"that young man is no gardener."

"Oh, Verily, I am sure he works very hard, and tends the garden beautifully," protested Melisent, pretending not to understand.

"No gardener yet ever handled book as he doth, or knew the names of them so well—Latin an' all," Verily declared, with great emphasis. "I misdoubt he is some adventurist of sorts, who hath heard of thy beauty and many virtues, as I have said before. And it is plain to see his heart is even now at thy feet. Lord knoweth what the Master will say when he finds out how things be."

"Fie! You think of nothing but lovers, Verily, like a green maid," said Melisent, frowning. "And I cannot think what hath come over thee to-night. I thought thou hadst a good opinion of Swithun."

"I like not his presuming," the maid replied, pursing up her mouth. "To see him at table with thee so familiar did irk me truly."

"But he behaved well. Thou wilt confess his manners were not rude, Verily," said the young lady, her eyes twinkling.

"I have naught to say agen his manners, so far as they go," was the answer; "they were very like my poor Jehoram's—when he was in company. It is not Swithun's manners, but his presuming, I take ill. What

call had he to laugh in thy presence, Honeysweet, as if he was thine equal ?"

"Maybe he is," said Melisent.

"And maybe the sky will fall ! Depend on 't there's no good in taking folks outen their station, Mistress ; a hog in armour is still a hog, and you can't make a silk purse outen a sow's ear."

"Verily, Kit Swithun is not a hog."

"Nor anything else, as I can make out !" exclaimed the good soul vehemently. "Tell me what or who he is, and I will say no more. But when a man feigns to be a gardener, and yet is like a gentleman, wi' soft speech, and 'by your leave, Mrs. Verily,' and 'Mrs. Verily is quite right,' and this, that, and t'other—why, then, I misdoubt him. He may be a knave in disguise."

"And he may be a Prince," said Melisent, laughing. "Come, Verily, canst give me any reason why he should not just as well be a Prince? He hath the bearing of one, and it would not be the first time a Prince hath masqueraded as a serving-man."

She spoke in a tone of banter, but as she did so there came an echo in her memory of a voice that, not many hours ago, had called her home "the Castle where the Sleeping Beauty lay dreaming." To that Castle the Prince had come, and the lady had been rescued from the tangled growth and cobwebs of centuries. Was such a rescue likely to come to her ? It seemed too impossible a dream. She bade a hasty good-night to Verily, and left her to digest the notion of Swithun's royalty in her romantic mind.

It sank into that friendly soil and germinated. Before morning Verily's view of the Gardener had swung round till, in her fancy, he had developed the lordly bearing and haughty manner of a King. She was ready to curtsey to him at breakfast !

CHAPTER XVI

" How ill this taper burns !—Ha ! who comes here ?
I think it is the weakness of mine eyes
That shapes this monstrous apparition.
It comes upon me. Art thou anything ?
Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil,
That mak'st my blood run cold, my hair to stare ?
Speak to me what thou art."

Shakespeare.

It was late when Melisent put out her candle. The day had been so unwontedly full of incident, so fraught with interests new in her life, that her mind, accustomed to the slow and monotonous measure of uneventful hours, danced in a turmoil of excited thoughts. She felt so wide awake when she got into bed that a book seemed a necessary sedative, and she lay reading till past midnight, not without qualms of economy over her wasting candle. When she reached a certain passage, the sense began to wander.

" ' But she, hastily coming in, the gentleman rose up, and with a courteous, though sad, countenance, presented himself unto her. Zelmane's eyes straight-willed her mind to mark him, for she thought in herself she had never seen a man of more goodly presence in whom strong making took not away delicacy' . . . took not away delicacy . . . goodly presence . . . the Gardener . . . a Prince . . . the Prince that awakened the Sleeping Beauty in the Enchanted Castle . . . he is no gardener . . . ' took not away delicacy, nor beauty

fierceness' "—with an effort she forced attention back to the lines seen by her half-closed eyes—" 'being such a right man-like man as Nature, often erring, shows she would fain make' . . . would fain make——"

At this point Melisent realized that she was going to sleep, and so blew out her candle. As she fell back drowsily on her pillow, a vague kaleidoscope of the day's pictures whirled round in her brain—faces, words, snips of sentences—and, through all, these last words she had read in the *Arcadia*: "A right man-like man as Nature would fain make." They faded in a dream wherein she knew herself to be in bed, and yet was in the Dragon's Court with Ivo Newman. She saw the Dragon suddenly belch forth fire and smoke, while his murmur changed to a deep growl of anger, as he advanced, with open jaws, upon her companion. Then the voice of the Gardener was heard saying: "What is he here for? Of course, there is a key to the door;" and at these words, though knowing herself to be dreaming, she sprang up quickly in bed, with a beating heart, broad awake, and full of strange consternation.

What if, at that very moment, the Stranger, whom she had not trusted from the first, were robbing the Library of its treasures? No sooner had the thought crystallized in her mind but she was up, and dressing in feverish haste, impelled by an irresistible impulse to protect her beloved books. Throwing a long dark cloak over her light garments, she opened her door and peered out. All was darkness and silence there, the long narrow corridor being lighted by no window, and she went back for her candle, not for fear of the dark, but because she was afraid of stumbling and making some noise. To avoid this, she had put on soft shoes

that trod with no more sound than the pad of Pearl's feet.

She slid from her room to the gallery overlooking the hall, and bent over to listen. The Library was connected with the hall by a short stone passage, and she fancied she could hear something moving there—a very faint, uncertain sound. But the hall itself lay still in its darkness. She could see a gleam of steel where a moon-glance fell upon the knightly armour, and her candle's yellow flicker, as she raised it, made weird shadows dance over the black floor and walls.

There was certainly a faint sound, coming up from somewhere. Could it be only the rats at their work? No; for in such dense stillness their gnawing would have been much louder. She shuddered, but did not shrink from what she conceived to be her duty. Down the staircase she sped, past the Dragon window, now very dim, through the shadowy hall, whose inanimate objects all seemed to become animate and move after her, and along the dark passage to the Library. With her hand on the heavy latch, she paused, to collect her senses and gain her wavering breath, for her heart was playing strange tricks and causing her to breathe with difficulty. What could she say if she found the Stranger within? What do? These questions began to trouble her. But she drew herself together with courage and pressed the latch.

It made a strong grating noise that echoed down the passage, and she paused again a moment before pushing open the heavy oaken door. When she did so and entered, something—was it a puff of air, or what?—floated past her, with an indescribable odour, and put out her candle. She stood thus, in the dark between the door and a screen that stood a yard or

swo from it to keep its draught from the room, for tome seconds petrified with fear and unable to move. A pulse was beating violently in her head—so violently that she almost lost consciousness. But again she took courage and advanced, grasping the screen to steady herself. Then she became aware of a dim, greenish light, and, when her eyes, filmed with fright, had pierced it, she saw, in that alcove of the Library devoted to books of Alchemy and Magic, a Shape—the weird, unearthly shape of which tradition told—in long monkish habit of saffron-brown, with a cowl drawn closely about its head.

It stood in a curious sickly radiance, that seemed to emanate from itself, and made its shadowy form so distinct as to be almost corporeal.

Melisent's knees shook and bent under her. A cold moisture broke out upon her skin. She had often asserted that she feared nothing supernatural, and had believed her own assertion. But she had never before seen anything like this, anything so definitely and unmistakably ghostly. She gave herself a shake, to try if she were really awake or dreaming, and made the sacred sign with a trembling hand; but still the figure did not vanish. It stood motionless, the face turned from her, the arms folded in the loose sleeves of its habit.

Then suddenly her fears gave place to a new sensation, borne away on a tide of awakened emotion; for she conceived that the ancestor she loved and revered had chosen to reveal himself to her, materialized before her eyes, in reward for her loyalty and devotion. Perhaps he had come to make known his Secret to her. It would not be the first time such a revelation had been vouchsafed from the spirit-world to a young

maid, she reflected. Had not Jeanne d'Arc and many others seen visions, heard voices? Through the haze of her senses she reached a firm stage, and stood upon it resolutely as she spoke, in a low voice, vibrating with awe and emotion, to the Apparition.

"What wouldst thou, troubled Spirit?" she asked. "Tell me, oh, tell me thy Secret."

But the Spectre uttered no sound, did not even turn its face from the bookshelves upon which its gaze appeared to be fastened. It stood like an embodied shadow in the greenish light that resembled the phosphorescence of vegetable decay; and Melisent noticed again the faint musty odour that had been wafted to her nostrils as she entered, when her candle had gone out, as in the air of a charnel-house.

"Art thou come to warn," she continued, "or to bring ill tidings? Speak to me, Spirit of my forefather, if so ye be, for I do not fear thee. I have never feared, but ofttimes longed to see thee. Do I not know well that Ansculf de Paganel can mean no harm to us, the last of his race, though he may be a messenger of God's judgment?"

A quivering movement of the head appeared to indicate that her appeal had been heard by the Phantom. She went on more boldly:

"But we have done nothing to offend thee or disgrace thine house. In all our pitiful poverty and the fall of our fortunes we have still striven to keep pure the honour of the de Paganels, to maintain as it ever was the sanctuary of our home. It hath never been profaned by herds of curious strangers, prying with vulgar eye among our precious relics of the past; and if we have now admitted one who is unworthy, it hath been in ignorance and to vindicate the hospitality of

our house. Believe me, if there be aught in the world that Melisent de Paganel can do to protect thy beloved books, to watch over, guard and keep them against marauders, that will she endeavour to do, for the love and honour she bears thee."

A deep sigh came from the motionless Figure, and slowly, very slowly, it turned towards her. At this she trembled again, and her senses swam. For where a face should have been she saw but a white patch, with two dark holes for eyes. She shuddered, and her lips grew parched ; but she would not let the new dread master her.

"Grant me a token," she pleaded, and her voice had grown tender and yearning as a mother's, "that thy presence here is gracious, and that thou wilt protect thy books. Just a motion, the lifting of an arm, if thou canst not speak, and I shall understand."

The right arm of the Spectre moved slowly upwards, and remained a few moments in the air that had become icy cold. Melisent drew a deep breath, and made the sign of the Cross once more.

"I thank thee, gentle Spirit," she whispered, "for that response to my prayer. Now do I know why I was summoned hither from my bed to-night. It was for my soul's comfort, since thou wilt continue to protect this place. And I will pray, as never before, for the repose of thy restless soul, dear Ghost. *Requiem æternam dona ei Domine.*"

She uttered the benison with slow and solemn emphasis, and, as she did so, the wan light faded, and the Figure from which it had appeared to emanate vanished in a complete and pitchy darkness.

An unconstrainable quaking shook through Melisent's body, the natural relaxing of nerves and muscles drawn

up to their highest tension. But she steadied herself with a determined effort, and, although almost unconscious, contrived to make her way out of the Library and close the door behind her. The candlestick was still in her hand, but she had no matches, and even had there been any, her fingers would have been too nerveless to light the candle. Stumbling and feeling her way by the walls, she gained the hall and then the staircase. How she ever mounted the stairs to her room she never knew, but she found herself presently lying on the bed, with her senses returning.

For some time she could not even think, but presently her mind began to awaken and ponder over what had happened.

"I have dreamed," she said to herself at first; and then: "No, I have *seen*, but whether with the eyes of sense or of the spirit I know not. Did my body actually go downstairs and mine eyes of flesh see what my brain now pictures? Or have I had a vision that only *seemed* real? But at least I could not have imagined that ghostly Figure so plainly. From its honourable bearing and the wondrous light it shed, I cannot believe it to have been one of those freakish sprites that haunt the elements and play pranks upon men. It must, indeed, have been the Genius of our house, guarding its treasures. But who knows what is to happen? Now that unwonted events come to disturb our tranquil days, and the loom of life begins to weave strange patterns, who can say what next will befall? Something stirring in my blood tells me there will be no to-morrow like the yesterdays flown. The thing which most irks me is that I must never speak of what I have seen. My father would but

smile, and Verily would be scared to death. Yet I would fain tell someone. I burn to share the revelation with one who would comprehend and not flout it. If Swithun were but one of us——"

She broke her thought off abruptly, and rose to doff her garments again. The candle she had lighted with much difficulty on reaching her chamber—with that longing for light which comes in all hours of alarm or dread—was now guttering in its socket. Verily would have read queer portents in the tears of wax that ran from it.

Melisent fell in a deep exhausted sleep just as her father and Ivo Newman entered the Library, to find all dark where they had expected light.

CHAPTER XVII

"Cowsloppes is for counsell,
for secrets vs between;
That none but you and I alone
should know the thing we meane;
And if you wil thus wisely do,
as I think to be best,
Then haue you surely won the field
and set my heart at rest."

A Nosegaie alvvaies Sweet.

In spite of her broken night, Melisent could not sleep after six o'clock in the morning, and before seven she was in the garden, weeding. That part she called 'Spring' was beginning to show a lovely face with the flowers she had planted there, penny packets of seed and wildling from the woods and meadows round. There the slender wild daffodil shook its rustling blossoms, daintier and sweeter far than its prouder sisters; there the 'rathe primrose that forsaken dies' reared its creamy, faint-scented petals to the sun, and fragrant violets peeped from under their broad, healing leaves, amid the last of aconites and snowdrops. Cowslips raised their little clusters of green buds almost ready to break into yellow hoards of honey, while the first forget-me-nots opened pinkish eyes among the frail wind-flowers; for Melisent had no plan or pattern, and all the lovely earth children were mingled in friendly company. Here and there she had planted Love-in-idleness, the tiny yellow heartsease, whose kitten-face, 'freaked with jet,' was beginning to peer

between her leaves prematurely, in hope of growing up soon into quite a big garden pansy; and the pale azure and white hepaticas rose with delicate firmness from their brown leaves, to give a sweet lesson in decorum to the flaunting crocuses, whose spent flames were now weakly sprawling about the earth, as if they had no more pride in their beauty. The dark blue bells of the scilla, so like in tint to Melisent's deep-fringed eyes, chimed a little peal of colour quite their own.

There had been a shower that morning, but now all the bees were out hunting in the many-coloured blossoms, and rolling their brown furry bodies in pollen. Lark and thrush, 'blackbird, and stare, and linnet,' sang a song of triumph over their nests full of gaping yellow bills. There was a freshness in the air that sent new life through the veins of every creature, and raindrops sparkling on flower and bush were like priceless jewels. On any other morning Melisent would have thrilled with joy at the world's loveliness, but, although it soothed and comforted her, she was not so acutely aware of it as usual, did not feel the same spring of rapture welling up in her heart, or want to sing with the birds. She spudded the weeds somewhat languidly, and took no notice of Pearl, who sported with butterflies here and there. Through her mind the events of last night passed in continual review, and so absorbed was she in her thoughts that she did not see Kit Swithun until he was quite close upon her.

"A perfect day for putting out young plants," he said. "Will you come and see the bed I have made for the cabbages and lettuces, madam?"

Her face brightened. He grieved to see its pallor and the dark shading under her eyes.

"Have you done all that this morning?" she said. "How quickly you work, Swithun, and how early you must have risen!"

"I was up soon after the first bird," he said, laughing; "and very likely, in the hottest part of the day, you may find me asleep under one of the hedges, for I had not a very long or reposeful night."

"The rats?" she queried compassionately.

"No. Pearl keeps them in order; though I must admit he might be quieter over his operations when he catches one of the poor wretches. The growling and scampering that goes on for about an hour is worse than the noise made by all the rats and mice together, left to themselves!"

"Then you would, perhaps, liefer be without him," she said eagerly. "And I do miss his presence; he can return to be my bedfellow."

How she had longed for the company of her little cat friend the night before! An animal is a good antidote against supernatural fears.

"Willingly," replied Swithun, "for I really do not need his guardianship. The creatures will not hurt me. I am too tough to eat! Jesting apart, since I have stuffed up all holes in the room I have not been disturbed at all."

"I am glad," she said simply; and then, without apparent cause, she sighed. He glanced at her face once more, and asked if she were quite well.

She smiled. "I am always well; but I am tired, having slept ill last night.

"I fear that was my fault," he said, "for I made you uneasy about the Library. Tell me if my words caused you sleeplessness."

She hesitated. A great longing to tell him everything was upon her. She resisted.

"Partly . . . but yes . . . that was the reason. I awoke with strange fears—so strange that I could not rest, and——" She stopped again, struggling with herself.

"Whatever you tell me," said Swithun gently, "will be sacred, and never divulged. You know that."

Their eyes met, and almost before she knew what she was saying Melisent had told him the whole history of what had occurred the night before. With bated breath she told him, as one who, having had a spiritual experience, feels she is on holy ground. Whatever he felt at the hearing, he could not smile, could but regard her gravely, helping her narrative with that unuttered and unutterable sympathy which is the greatest gift we can ever offer to our fellow-creatures.

When she had finished, he was silent for some moments. Then he said:

"You are absolutely sure it was a supernatural manifestation; that what you saw had no corporeal being, and was really a shade from the under-world?"

"I am sure," she answered. "How could I be mistaken, Swithun, when the room was in darkness, and yet I did see plainly the Figure standing in a halo of light, as it were, and such an unearthly light, resembling green moonshine! I have never seen its like before, except in a Jack-o'-lantern that once danced over the meadow beyond, when it had been long flooded."

"You do not think"—he paused, and went on—"that your senses were overwrought, or that you walked in your sleep, and that the Ghost was but a figment of your vivid imagination."

Melisent pondered. Truth stood before everything

with her, and she would sooner give up a cherished conviction than refuse to face any possibility of error.

"I have asked myself that," she said at last; "for I know that my mind is quick to create objects of fancy, and sometimes we can see that which we expect to see. When I found myself again upon my bed, without remembering how I did come there, methought the rest must be a dream, or I had walked in my sleep, as you say. And now, in the bright daylight, it doth all seem a vision of the brain. But yet there is something tells me that I did see the Shape, and that it was truly the spirit of Ansculf de Paganel; because, though I have oft fancied I saw or heard things before, naught hath ever been so clear as this in my mind. I cannot say more; but—yes—I am full sure I did, in truth, see the Phantom of Ansculf de Paganel."

He had never listened to more valid reasoning for faith. After all, can it be better expressed than in that formula: "I believe because I do, because something within me assures me that my belief is true"? When we do not believe, we say our reason rebels, but this only means that we have not the implicit faith which defies rational argument; we have no inner voice saying definitely, "That is true." It was, however, Swithun's purpose at this moment to foster doubt.

"The part of a phantom has before now been played by a man for his own purpose," he said, as if to himself.

Melisent looked startled.

"Oh no," she cried; "surely not. No man dare tempt the unseen world thus, even if he could make himself appear a spirit, the which it would be hard to do."

"Not so hard as you think," Swithun assured her.

"Night and darkness lend strange illusions, and there are other means of producing them."

"But the Stranger was away with my father," she said, showing that she had followed his thread of thought.

"Are you sure of that?"

She was not, having no idea what the time had been when she descended to the Library.

"Oh, Swithun," she exclaimed piteously, "why do you plant such ideas in my mind? How can you think of such things? That I should be duped and made to believe a solid body a phantom—impossible! Surely it were wicked and inhospitable to cherish such ill suspicions of our guest."

"Do you entirely trust him?" was the Gardener's only reply; and for some instants she did not answer.

"There is something about him I do not like," he went on—"a false, affected smile, eyes that look all ways at once, as if on guard and watchful. I could swear he is admitted here upon a lie, that he is engaged upon no literary work."

She looked at him sternly, and he read her look. "Why are *you* here?" it asked. He responded to it.

"My own case is open to suspicion, I own; but——" He had no defence to offer, and the absurdity of the situation struck him so forcibly that he wanted to laugh, but resisted.

Melisent was thinking deeply, and did not speak for some minutes. Then she said:

"Why do we trust some men and distrust others, for no good reason? My thoughts about the Stranger chime with yours. I know not why. But as to the Phantom—there I cannot but believe the evidence of mine own senses. I saw——"

"What did you see? Anything that was positively not a man in a monkish habit and cowl?"

"A face with no features, an unearthly light."

Swithun smiled. Goaded by that smile, she cried: "Oh, I know my brain was excited and the Library nearly dark; the moonlight may have crept through the curtains—or were they drawn? I forget. Swithun, I prithee look not like that. Advise me—tell me what to do if . . . thou art right."

He had sown the seed of doubt cleverly. How long would it hold against the faith of inner conviction? He did not know, but struck the iron while it was hot.

"Would you like me to sleep in the Library and keep watch?" he asked. "It is quite possible to do so, and there is nothing I should like better than to dream among those glorious books. They would surely perforate me with learning. But you must trust me more than I dare hope for to allow such a privilege."

"You . . . sleep . . . there!" she uttered slowly; "but, no . . . would you truly dare—in that haunted place? I have never thought I did fear the spirits, and yet I would not sleep alone there for all the gold of the Indies!"

"I would do more than that to serve"—Swithun began, then checked himself and substituted—"to save your precious books. But it may not be necessary; my suspicions may be entirely unfounded. Forgive me for meddling in matters that do not concern me. I will now go and fetch the young plants."

He turned aside with assumed carelessness, to be arrested by Melisent's voice, sharply distressed.

"Stay! Do not go, Swithun. I would have you

sleep in the Library, while the Stranger is here, if—if I thought my father and Verily would not know—if——"

"It is only necessary to be there till the new Catalogue is made, or at least till I have investigated the Phantom," said the young man, with a serious face disguising the gladness of his heart. "And I will undertake that no one shall know, unless I have to unmask a villainy; in which case it would have to be made known to your father."

They talked the matter over for some time, and the more they talked, the more was Melisent convinced that Swithun's offer must be accepted. Before he went to his work again all had been arranged. She was to give him the key of a side-door and show a candle at her window overlooking the Dragon's Court when all the house was quiet, her father and his guest abed. Swithun would watch for the signal and enter, leaving again at daybreak, when he judged all would be safe.

"Why do I so trust him?" Melisent asked of herself, when she was alone. "Why do I permit him to concern himself with our fortunes? Why tell him what I will not tell to my father or Verily? Is he not, after all, only a stranger like Ivo Newman himself—a gardener who has never worked in a garden before, and who is not what he feigns to be, as Verily says? Ah, well-a-day! How will it end? If my father ever learns I have admitted this young man into his Library, he will never pardon me. My heart misgives me, lest I be doing very ill; and yet . . . and yet . . . I feel it to be right."

She ate but little breakfast, and Verily railed at her.

"Thou'rt in love with thy Gardener-Prince?" she

said. "I'll warrant, Honeysweet, he was in thy dreams last night."

"You are wrong, Verily," replied Melisent stiffly; "he was not. And I prithee let me hear no more of this. For once it was a jest, but a jest palls, and I care not to hear more of Kit Swithun, who is naught to me but the Gardener."

The rebuke, the pronoun 'you,' and the air of dignity with which both were uttered made Verily stare. But she said no more on the subject, only crooned in her cracked voice for Melisent's hearing:

"'Such bitter fruit as love doth yeelde,
Such broken sleepes, such hope unsure,
Thy call so oft hath me beguilde
That I unneth can wel endure;
But crie, alas! as I have cause,
Fie upon Love and all his Lawes.'"

CHAPTER XVIII

> "Hence, hence profane, and none appear
> With anything unhallowed here;
> No jot of leaven must be found
> Concealed in this most holy ground.
>
> "What is corrupt and soured with sin
> Leave that without, then enter in."
>
> *Herrick.*

MELISENT took no pleasure in the garden that morning, and could not rest at her work. A hundred times she reproached herself for telling Swithun what she had seen in the Library, and still more for consenting to the arrangement for his sleeping there. It was so full of deceit, she felt, to admit him into the house without her father's knowledge and consent. At last she put away her lace-pillow abruptly, and rose with a stifled gasp.

"Oh, it was wrong—wrong!" she muttered aloud, "wrong to put such faith in him—wrong to have such base suspicions of our guest. I must seek Swithun and tell him that I cannot do what we have planned. I must not. It were unseemly in me. Methinks I have been rash and easily led."

As she went out she paused upon the threshold, and then, in place of seeking Swithun, she turned aside into the ruined Chapel which had once been the burial-place of the de Paganels, and where the remains of the mother she had scarcely known lay under a plain cross of white marble. The Chapel had fallen

into decay long before this last interment, and her grandfather, great-grandfather, grand-aunts, and uncles, had all been buried in a vault of the Parish Church. But her father had never approved of this, and had insisted that his dead wife should be near him at Paganel Garth, laid to rest with all the rites of the Roman Church.

It was a sad place now. All the beautiful colouring by which it had been embellished in early Tudor days had been destroyed by damp and mould, till but a glimpse of soft blue, or gold, or crimson, here and there remained to suggest its former glories. An old book chained to the carved ebony lectern was dropping to pieces (her father had rescued the most valuable Missals, with the few paintings not too far gone in decay); the curtains over the Altar hung in tatters; and had it not been for Melisent's care that Altar would have been covered by the dirty litter of jackdaws and owls in the roof. But she swept it two or three times a week, and kept there vases of such flowers or evergreens as she could find. So with her mother's tomb. It was never allowed to share the dust and disorder that desecrated the rest of the Chapel, but lay white and shining as cleanly as when it had first been placed there over the mortal remains of Melisent Hawyse de Paganel some fifteen years before.

The one really beautiful thing left to the Chapel was its stained-glass window, executed by a Venetian in the reign of Henry VII., and representing St. George and the Dragon; a beast strongly resembling that of the family arms, but of very wonderful colouring, which, in spite of centuries of dust and rain upon it, still showed gloriously when the sun fell through it.

It is not surprising that a highly imaginative girl,

left to herself entirely so far as religious training was concerned, and of such ancestry, should regard this place as a Holy of Holies, and bring to its Altar all her sorrows, doubts, and confusions of mind. The fact that her forefathers had worshipped there would alone have been sufficient to cause the deep reverence she felt for it; but added to this was an æsthetic appreciation of all that was most beautiful and inspiriting in the old creed, linked, as it was, with so much of the exquisite poetry, the sublime deeds, and marvellous traditions of the past. How could she, who revelled passionately in the legends of the Sangreal, fail to experience a strange exaltation of spirit, an uplifting of her soul to God, at the very sight of that Altar upon which the Holy Cup had once stood? It is true she had never seen the Host raised, or heard the tinkling of that 'sancing bell,' which is not without effect upon the most secular mind, since quite a small child, when she had been taken by her father to a service of his Church in a distant town. But she felt a Presence there, nevertheless, and before It her spirit bowed to-day, as she prayed fervently for guidance, and to be delivered from the evil thing.

She arose from her knees feeling comforted, and resolved to trust in God. Convinced more than ever that she had seen the benign appearance of her forefather the night before, and that he would protect their house without earthly aid (for religion and a belief in the supernatural are but two sides of one mental state, and interdependent, both being based on an innate sense of mystery and consciousness of unseen forces around, above, and below), she was feeling thus absolved from responsibility and ready to take her stand on faith, when her exalted spirit received a

painful shock, and she stood before the Altar with horrified, dilated eyes; for there, in the aisle of the Chapel, between the tombs of her mother and an ancient stone Crusader, stood Ivo Newman, his hat upon his head, and a cigarette between his smiling lips.

"What a charming scene!" he said, and his mellifluous drawl seemed to cut the silent air of the place like a shout. "Pray do not let me disturb you at your devotions, Miss Millicent" (he always persisted in modernizing her name). "I had no suspicion you were *une petite religieuse.*"

The bright sunshine slanted through a broken part of the roof upon his mocking face, and Melisent wondered that it was not a thunderbolt, to strike him where he stood, thus defying and blaspheming, as she thought, the Holy Deity. For to this naturally reverent girl he was committing an act of sacrilege horrible in its profanity.

"By your leave, sir," she said icily, "we will not talk here; it is sacred ground. Permit me, I pray you, to pass;" for he stood blocking her way to the door.

"Sacred ground, is it?" he echoed, smiling more evilly still, in her eyes, and throwing the end of his cigarette on the ground as he spoke. It happened to fall on the stone that covered an ancient vault wherein some far ancestor was buried. Melisent crossed herself rapidly, and, picking it up, flung it through the open door.

"I beg your pardon. Have I committed a heinous sin?" He laughed outright now, and laid his hand upon her arm. "Little saint, don't look so coldly on me. I am sure you are not really cold. There is fire

in your eyes. Point me out the beauties of your Chapel, which to my lay sight are not too obvious. It seems but a happy hunting-ground for birds."

"Sir, my mother lies buried here!" cried Melisent passionately, wrenching her arm from his grasp. "You do intrude, and I beg you to depart at once from this sacred place, which your presence defiles."

She fled past him and out of the door, choking in her throat, and with eyes full of blinding tears. To Swithun she ran and stood before him with clenched hands, breathing heavily, and scarlet to the roots of her black hair; a beautiful, angry child.

"Something has happened!" he ejaculated in alarm. "What is it? Tell me. What shall I do for you?"

"Go, slay the Stranger—slay him before the Altar he hath desecrated!" she cried, in a voice that trembled with irrepressible passion.

"With pleasure," said Swithun, throwing down his 'dibber,' and straightening himself up. "But I should like first to know what he has done."

Melisent drew a deep breath and laughed tremulously.

"I am mad, I do believe," she faltered, all the colour fading out of her face. "God forgive me for my wicked speech. But, oh, Swithun, to enter the Chapel with his hat upon his head, and smoking a——" She could not go on.

"The cur! Did he really do that?" asked Swithun, in disgust.

"Ay, and he spoke like a mocking fiend. I wondered God did not strike him dead. No good can be in such a man, and now I share all your distrust of him, Swithun. I know he is here for ill purposes.

Promise me you will keep watch on him, by day as well as by night. I shall know no peace till he is gone."

"I swear to you that I will spare no pains to unmask him," said the young man earnestly; "for he must be even a greater scoundrel than I thought, to annoy and distress so sweet a lady. Say but the word, and I will pound him to a jelly, even now. It would give me the keenest pleasure."

He squared himself to his full height, and Melisent thought of certain words she had read last night: "Such a right manlike man as Nature shows she fain would make." In fancy she saw him 'pounding' Newman, to her great satisfaction. But she declined the offer of that knightly service, nevertheless.

"It would displease my father," she said, "and lead to thy dismissal. But I thank thee, Swithun, right heartily, all the same. Forget thou hast seen me so moved, and look for a light at my chamber window to-night. Fare thee well now."

And so fell her resolve, her faith in Ansculf's power to guard his own! Is it not the natural way of all humanity, even the most religious, to depend more upon the seen than the unseen? "Trust in God and keep your powder dry," is an injunction that speaks volumes!

CHAPTER XIX

"Her eyes the glowworm lend thee,
The shooting stars attend thee,
And the elves also,
Whose little eyes glow
Like the sparks of fire, befriend thee.

"Let not the dark thee cumber,
What though the moon doth slumber?
The stars of the night
Will lend thee their light,
Like tapers clear without number."

Herrick.

THE day had spent itself lavishly in fierce little storms of rain and dazzling golden hours, laden with sweet and pungent odours from wet mould and opening leaves. The ravishing song of birds, the soft flashes of butterfly wings and low boom of humble-bees, declared an April day, turning its back upon grim Winter, its face to May and Summer. It was a day to be thankful for, and yet to Melisent it was not a happy one. She was haunted inwardly by her conspiracy with Swithun and doubts of her own discretion, while bodily she was haunted by Ivo Newman, who followed her from place to place, and insisted upon engrossing her attention. Her father had announced that an inspiration had come to him, demanding solitude and meditation, so that his companion was free to roam where he would, and amuse himself as he could.

Melisent had not entirely lost her fear and distrust of him. Further acquaintance could not dispel the curious perturbation she felt in his presence. But her will and reason rebelled against this irrational feeling, which, she argued, was unjust and uncharitable. She tried honestly to like the guest her father liked so much, and she could not but own that he was interesting. He was careful not to offend her again, as he had done in the Chapel. He told her amusing stories; he tried to ingratiate himself with Pearl; he praised her work, her garden, and, in covert language, her person. For he made no secret of his admiration: every look spoke it ardently; and is any woman entirely proof against the homage of a man?

To Melisent it was a thing unknown, but dreamed of, in those vague maiden dreams that have their rise in books, their development in imagination. A girl dreams, wordlessly and formlessly, of the lover to come, as a positive and necessary fact—something that must assuredly dawn upon her life one day. When he actually appears, she is disturbed and afraid, but under the fear and agitation there is, nevertheless, a current of joy and fulfilment. And so Melisent, though troubled and suspicious, began to feel a curious little stir of interest in the Stranger, to blame herself for her cold behaviour to him, and to wonder—very indefinitely, it is true—if he could possibly be *the* Lover, or even *a* Lover, who had come to her.

He worked upon her sympathies, sure way to touch any woman who has a heart for kindness; spoke of his lonely life, his lack of mother, father, sister, or brother, the emptiness of his existence, till she pitied him, and spoke gentle words. Once or twice she came near to being her natural self with him, and speaking to him

of matters intimate. But something always held her back. Her fear of him asserted itself; she could never quite meet his bold eyes, fixed so immovably upon her face. And, above all, she feared his touch, which sent a fire burning through her veins, and seemed to make her heart shiver. His mellifluous voice, his tender, caressing words, drew her towards him, while his personality repelled her. She breathed a sigh of relief when he left her, yet found herself listening, not without some eagerness, for the footstep of his return.

But we all deceive ourselves with reasons that fit to our desires, and Melisent told herself that she would fain keep Newman by her side, because it comforted her to know he was not near her father. A suspicion tormented her that the Stranger was insinuating some kind of uncanny influence over her father—for what purpose she could not conceive—and this suspicion filled her with strange dread. Swithun's words had added to its force and supplied a reason. Of course, if Newman had designs upon the Library, he could not do better than obtain a certain power over its possessor. But was this all? She feared not. Newman's obvious indifference to the treasures of the Library, and books generally, suggested that there must be a further reason for his presence at Paganel Garth. What was he doing there? What did he want? What was the secret of that compelling force he had exercised to make himself from an unwelcome into a most welcome and honoured guest. She puzzled over this problem in vain.

She was far too sage not to have seen that her father was inordinately susceptible to flattery, and that Newman cajoled him completely. But, in her mind that could not sufficiently account for the affectionate way

in which Mr. de Paganel looked at him and talked to him, the way in which their eyes met full of comprehension, as if they held in common some secret, some definite understanding and sympathy. Her old books accounted for such things by magic, and Melisent could not shake off the feeling that her father had fallen under some form of spell. Verily accounted for it differently. She had one theory, which embraced everything—the theory of Love! The Stranger had fallen in love with Melisent, she declared, and was wheedling for her father's consent before he appealed to her. He had come on report of her beauty, as the Prince in a fairy-tale, and he meant to carry her away. Mr. de Paganel had already begun to feel for him the affection of a father-in-law, which made everything clear to her mind. But this theory did not satisfy Melisent in the least. She could believe that Ivo Newman found her charming, as he declared (the reflection in her mirror prohibited over-much modesty in this respect: she knew that she was beautiful, indulged in a shamefaced self-admiration at times), and she thought he might be falling in love with her. But she failed to see in this any adequate reason why he should spend so much time and attention in subjugating her father.

It was inevitable that, in thinking of Newman, she must mentally contrast him with the Gardener, to the Gardener's favour, and ask herself why she distrusted the one as thoroughly as she trusted the other; why she was ready to admit Swithun, whom she had known so little longer, into the sacred Library, among her father's books and papers at night, while she feared unaccountably Newman's presence there. It was impossible to answer this self-questioning

satisfactorily. She was too inexperienced to know that there are certain men and women in the world whom every other man, woman, child, and animal instinctively trust at first glance. The secret of this confidence who can tell? It may be some form of telepathy, some outer radiation of inner soul force. But, whatever it be, we of the larger world recognize it as an indubitable fact. Kings have chosen their ministers and counsellors by it; great generals and statesmen have ever possessed an acute sense of it. Melisent was ignorant of psychology, and therefore puzzled to find she could no more shake off her implicit belief in Kit Swithun than she could her implicit disbelief in Newman.

When night came and she stole from her room, without a candle, to open the door for Swithun, her heart beat fast and furiously, her hands trembled. It was dark in the narrow corridors, and she had to grope her way till she came to the staircase window, where the faint light of stars through the coloured Dragon showed the way dimly. The heavy bolt of the great oaken door seemed to make noise enough to waken the dead as she undid it, and she paused fearfully to listen for a footfall; but no sound followed. As the silence reassured her, she opened the door gently and let in the cool night air, fresh and sweet after its day of showers.

It was gusty outside, and had the rain fragrance still; but stars were twinkling out in the dome over the budding trees, and a pearly radiance showed that the waning moon was breaking somewhere through the floating clouds. Swithun entered with bare head, carrying a bundle. She put her finger on her lips, and led him, still groping, to the Library. There she

breathed more freely, for the room lay beneath a long disused chamber in the uninhabited wing of the house.

"To-morrow and other nights," she said, "I will undo the bolt earlier, and when you see the light in my window, you will know that all is safe and the household in bed. I fear me you will be very comfortless here, Swithun."

His eyes followed hers to the low couch in the deep chimney corner, whereon Godwin de Paganel would often lie for hours meditating upon his Olympian ideas.

"No, indeed! Why, this is luxury. And I have brought blankets." He laid his bundle on the couch and smiled at her.

"You will need them. The nights are cold yet. I have here"—she took a small phial from her pocket—"a cordial of my own making, which will warm you if you feel a chill."

"You are too good to me," he said, taking the tiny flagon from her hand. His dark eyes sought hers with more than gratitude in them. She turned away.

"One more favour I ask of you," he said earnestly, and she paused. "Will you show me those old papers of your ancestor's, Ansculf de Paganel, which you said your father possessed? I should so greatly like to have a glimpse of them."

She drew herself up. "What! show you my father's privy papers! Oh, what do you ask?" she cried, alarmed and distressed. "They have never been shown to any man."

"Pray forgive me," he exclaimed penitently. "I did not realize they were so private and personal. I thought——" He paused.

"But, even if I would, I could not show them to

you," she said, "for they lie in a secret drawer of the cabinet yonder, and I know not how to find the hidden spring." She pointed to a small ebony cabinet near the window, a lovely thing inlaid with mother-of-pearl and jacinth, but dusty and unpolished.

"It is locked, perhaps," said Swithun, meditatively regarding it.

"I think not; but there are concealed drawers in it that I know of, for I have seen my father open them. He hath never told me how. You will guard and protect my father's treasures, Swithun."

"I swear to you that I will guard them with my life," he answered low. "No harm shall come to this house while I am able to protect it. Believe in me, trust me, dear lady."

"I do trust you, Swithun," she said, "or why should I thus lead you in here? I bid you good-night now, and may God and His Angels defend thee from all harm!"

Before he knew what she was about to do, she had advanced two paces, and made the sign of the Cross on his forehead, uttering below her breath an old Latin formula against evil spirits. Then, with swift movement, she left him, closing the door softly behind her.

She mounted the staircase slowly, and had nearly reached the top, when the sound of footsteps gave her pause, and made her heart throb wildly. Someone was coming down! She saw a faint glimmer of light from the corridor above, and realized in an instant all it might mean if her father should discover her on the stairs and Swithun in the Library. How could she explain? What could she do? No thought of a supernatural visitation crossed her mind, which bent itself entirely to the worst danger of the situation.

Springing up the last step quickly, she hid herself behind a heavy oaken column at the top of the staircase. Not too soon. She was hardly there before she saw, stealing along the passage, with furtive glances to right and left, the face and figure of Ivo Newman, fully dressed, and carrying high a candle, which threw its yellow beams into every corner, casting his black palpitating shadow behind him. Melisent felt that he must hear the beating of her heart as he passed, and she held her breath in desperate alarm. But he, peering into the darkness below, saw nothing of her. There was no time to think, to reason, but fear lent aid to her wit and gave her a sudden inspiration.

Creeping noiselessly from her hiding-place, she waited till Newman had reached a curve in the staircase, and then leant over the banisters towards the candle he still held aloft. With all the force of her lungs she blew it out, leaving them both in darkness, all the more profound for the recent light, and, giving vent to a long low wail, like that of a lost and tortured spirit, she fled as quickly and silently as she could to her room.

The ejaculation, "Good God!" reached her as she flew, and presently, listening at her door, she heard the man strike a match and come stumbling up the stairs again. Her acutely strong hearing caught the words, "about enough of this," as he went along the corridor, and she heard his door close softly. Then she drew breath and began to laugh.

"Oh, Pearl, Pearl, how I did fright him!" she murmured to the white cat, who had gladly returned to his accustomed bed on the cushioned window-seat; "and—oh—oh—how frightened I was myself!" She was laughing and crying too now. "What would

have happened had he seen me there? What would have happened had he gone to the Library? Would Swithun have slain him? He swore to guard our treasure with his life. Have I prevented bloodshed? Pearl—little white cat—what is coming to this house? What is to happen next?"

Pearl turned his soft warm body over till his snowy breast lay stretched for her caressing hand, and began to purr tremulously. He was never too sleepy to recognize the touch of her loved hand and respond to her voice in his lazy feline way. He gazed at her out of his long green eyes dreamily, as who should say, "What does it all matter? Let us but sleep": and watched Melisent unrobe with a queer mingling of interest and indifference. When her candle went out, he crept from his cushion to her bed, and she felt the comfort of his presence greatly—a living, sympathetic creature in the darkness and silence, haunted by vague horrors. For sleep did not come quickly. Once again her nerves had been overwrought.

CHAPTER XX

" Twentie iorneys would I make,
and twentie waies would hie me,
To make aduenture for her sake
to set some matter by me."
Fain wold I have a Pretie Thing to giue vnto my Ladie.

" I HAVE bethought me, Melisent, that it is meet we offer entertainment to our neighbour, Lady Manwood," said Godwin de Paganel to his daughter at breakfast next morning.

Melisent glanced at their guest, divining instantly whence this suggestion had emanated.

" I have often heard you say we are not able to entertain here, sir," she answered.

" True ; but there are occasions when exceptions must be made. Our house hath never been lacking in hospitable courtesy, and Lady Manwood hath entertained me and my guest right royally." He frowned upon her slightly, unused to opposition in any matter of his choice.

" No man could ever accuse the de Paganels of a lack of hospitality," remarked Newman, in his suave, purring voice. " My presence here is a standing proof to the contrary."

" What would you have me do, then, my father ?" inquired Melisent. with a sinking of the heart.

" I would have thee write a gracious letter to Lady Manwood, inviting her and the lady who lives with her to sup with us to-morrow night."

"To-morrow!" ejaculated Melisent, in dismay. "But, nay, that is impossible. We cannot be prepared so soon."

"Then say Friday. It will be better, doubtless."

"But Verily would die of fear at aught so unlucky! She will never adventure anything of a Friday, and would be sure the fire would refuse to roast or boil on such a day!"

"A plague on Verily's childishness!" cried de Paganel, as nearly petulant as his grand manner would permit. "But choose whatever day seemeth well to thee, my child, so be it as soon as possible. Thou art lady of this house, and must appoint all as suits thee."

His courteous sweetness was admirable to hear, but for once failed to impress Melisent. She sighed.

"Let it be Monday, then," she said. "It would surely be failing in ceremony to give a lady shorter notice than that."

"I believe thou art right. Monday shall be the day, if it will suit our guest," he said, turning to Newman with a friendly smile. Melisent marvelled again, and her heart sank still deeper. Why did her father speak to this stranger of a few days' acquaintance as if he were an old and beloved friend?

"I fear I am trespassing too long upon your great kindness and that of your charming daughter," responded Newman, smiling, and fixing upon Melisent his inscrutable eyes.

"My daughter and I are both honoured and refreshed by your company," said de Paganel. "It is like a breeze of outer air in our close and cloistered life; and I trust you will remain with us as long as you are able to do so."

"My gratitude for your unparalleled kindness and hospitality cannot be expressed in words," was the answer. "I only trust I may be able to return it in some substantial way later on."

A meaning glance passed between them, which was not lost upon the girl, who watched the Stranger closely, trying to solve the mystery of his power over her father. He read hostility in her eyes and added:

"But I note that Miss Millicent does not echo your invitation, sir. If my presence is unwelcome to her, it is my duty to depart at once."

"Melisent!" Her father looked at her in displeased surprise. "My daughter find you an unwelcome guest! What could lead you to imagine such a thing?"

"Is it not so, Miss Millicent?" demanded Newman, his bold strange eyes fixed upon her face.

"You mistake, sir. Any guest my father chooses to honour is welcome to me," she replied, with averted eyes.

"Thou wilt write the notes this morning, my child," said de Paganel, satisfied. "One to Lady Manwood, one to Miss Tucker. And yes—I think you should add one to Sir Christopher. He might come from London to be present at such an unaccustomed meeting of our families. I have not seen him since he was a mere boy, but he must be a man of over thirty years now. Dost remember him, Melisent?"

"But faintly, sir. I have a dim remembrance of wonderful stories he used to tell me, but that is all."

"Ah, I warrant he could tell more wonderful stories now, being a great student and discoverer in science, I hear. He hath chambers in London—I know not where, so it will be necessary to send his invitation

to Lady Manwood, begging her the favour of advancing it to him. And be sure to address it in full—to Sir Christopher Fenyon Manwood, Baronet, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S. I think that is all."

Melisent wrote this down with care upon the ivory tablets which hung, with keys, scissors, and other useful implements, at her waist. Then she excused herself, and was leaving the room when she heard Ivo Newman say, with a laugh :

"Strange things happen in your house, sir. Did you happen to hear anything at twelve o'clock last night ?"

Melisent paused behind the screen to listen a moment.

"Nothing but the rumbling of rats and hoot of a screech-owl once. Were you disturbed ?" asked de Paganel.

"It might have been the screech-owl. I thought I heard a long wailing cry in the corridor outside my door, and could have sworn the house was haunted. 'Such tricks hath strong imagination';" and he laughed.

Melisent went out, softly closing the door behind her.

"So !" she murmured to herself. "He doth not tell my father he was wandering about the house at midnight. Why not ?"

When she came into the kitchen, for the first time that morning, Verily sprang upon her, with eyes full of alarm.

"Oh, Honeysweet, did ye hear it last night ?" she cried. "I dursen't speak of it before the Master, but I ha' been longing to ask thee. Didst hear it—the Death Portent ?"

Melisent smiled as she shook her head. "What was it ?" she asked.

"The Lament of the Spirit that doth always cry before death or misfortune to the House of Paganel," said Verily, in an awed whisper. "I did hear it distinctly down the haunted corridor last night. Ye must ha' heard it, too, an ye were not asleep, for it is nigher thy door than mine. It froze the very marrow in my bones with its unked wail."

"Thou'rt too fanciful, Verily. It must have been an owlet hooting," Melisent suggested, following her father's lead. "I heard one last night before I went to sleep, and it had an eerie sound in the silence."

"Owls do not hoot *in the house,* Mistress. Mark my word, it was no living thing I heard. I told Swithun of it this morning, and he did not scoff as thou, but said there were more things in heaven and earth than we wot of—or to that like. He can speak very featly sometimes, can Swithun. Moreover, he hath owned to me that he hath heard strange sounds before now in this house, and seen strange sights. That did he."

"Did he hear the Portent wail last night?"

"Nay; he was too sound asleep at the back. And how should he, being a stranger? Such spirit voices are only heard by the family, or by those who have served the family for many years. But he believeth all the same, Honeysweet, and 'blessed is he that hath not seen, and yet hath believed.' No good ever came of unbelief, Mistress, mark my words."

She would have held forth on this theme for a long time had not Melisent changed the current of her thoughts in a twinkling by unfolding her father's commands as to the entertainment of Lady Manwood. The shock was almost too great for Verily. She fell into a chair and gasped.

"It can never be," she ejaculated faintly. "Three

guests at Paganel Garth! 'Tis unheard of! Why, Melisent, Mistress, we have not a whole set of covers, and where, in the name of wonder, are the cates to come from? Giles did tell me only this morning that he would let us have no more meat without payment."

"We must bring down the old damasks and plate—all the things that have been packed away these many years. But the meats—God knows where they will come from! How much money have we?"

Verily went to a drawer and fetched from it a small bag. She counted out the few silver and copper coins contained therein, and found not enough even to pay for a capon. Tears came into the good woman's eyes.

"It cannot be done, and I will tell the Master so myself," she declared stoutly.

"But it must be done!" exclaimed Melisent proudly. "Can we shame ourselves before the Stranger? Oh, never! Besides, you know my father, Verily. Hath he ever brooked denial of his wishes?"

Verily shook her head sadly. "Do I not know it indeed? For the sweetest mannered gentleman in the world he hath a most untoward perversity and will have what pleaseth him, whomsoever lacks! But what to do?"

"Maybe good Farmer Bounds would trust us for a capon," Melisent suggested. "We could pay at Midsummer, when I have the money for my work. Or he might take something as a warranty. I have still left this ring that Aunt Lettice gave to me. 'Tis worn, but the gold is true."

She twisted the thin circlet round her finger with a pang. It had grown dear to her, and she would miss it.

Verily seemed not to hear, being lost in thought. Presently she said:

"Mistress, let me tell Swithun of our plight. He is a shrewd lad and hath many good notions. Moreover, he hath found several things in the stable and his chamber that, he saith, could be sold for good silver; things we know not of, and that have no value for us."

"What kind of things?" Melisent looked incredulous.

"I can hardly recollect; but, for one, an old broken riding-whip with a handle of gold and precious stones set in it . . . and—and—let me see—a faldstool of strange and antique design. It hath only one leg, 'tis true, but could be mended. And there's a leather bottel that will not hold water—still less wine—the which, he saith, could be sold for a curiosity. Swithun assures me that there is a craze for such old rubbish in the towns. Maybe he could sell them for us."

Melisent was dubious. Who would be so foolish as to buy broken and useless things? she thought. Yet the jewelled riding-whip might be of value. And Swithun already knew of their poverty. There was indeed little to hide from him.

"Let us ask him, Honey," Verily went on pleading. "I can speak to him at dinner, when he liketh well that I talk to him while he eats, being a silent lad himself. I warrant he hath not been used to female society and finds it to his taste"—(she simpered a little)—"for he doth smile often and beg me to go on with my tale."

"Do not lose thy soft heart to him, Verily," said Melisent, smiling too, as she conjured up in her mind a vivid picture of Swithun at meals with Verily in the great raftered kitchen, and imagined his silent amusement at the old maiden's volubility.

Verily bridled. "No fear of that, Mistress Melisent my heart is made fast for ever to my own sweetheart, wherever he be. For, as the song saith—

"'And as the Gods do know,
and world can Witnesse beare,
I neuer servèd other Saint
nor Idol otherwhere.'"

Nay, I have already forewarned Swithun that I be not free to courtship, so that it is of no manner of use any man trying to win me. And, moreover, he is too young for my taste. A woman of forty year doth not want a beardless boy to her mate."

Verily's age varied according to her mood and circumstances, hovering between twenty-eight and forty-five, for she seemed able to believe herself any age she liked at the moment. And as nobody knew exactly what her actual years were, she was never contradicted. She had barely made the above statement when Swithun entered. He held in his hand a dead rabbit, which he presented to Verily with a bow saying :—

"Accept a meal from the Gardener. This poor little beast is but fresh killed, trespassing among my young plants. The sharp steel was quick, so Mistress Melisent's tender heart need not suffer."

He did not see Melisent till he had finished speaking, when he pulled his cap, in true rustic fashion, and wished her good-morning.

"Ah, Swithun, if it had but been a hare!" cried Melisent. "We need something to make a stew next Monday, when we would entertain guests."

"If she hasn't been and told him herself!" muttered Verily; "and I bid her leave it to me."

"Guests!" said Swithun, surprised—"more guests!"

"Yes; my Lady Manwood and my lady's companion, with, perhaps Sir Christopher, her stepson."

"I thought Sir Christopher was in London," remarked Swithun.

"He is in London, but my father will have him invited. Most heartily do I hope he will not come."

"Do you dislike him, then, so much?" Swithun asked.

"Nay, I have not seen him since I was a child. But he is very learned, and I should have fear of him. The ladies I do not mind so much, if we had aught to put before them. But we . . . I——"

The red blood surged to her brow. He knew she found it hard to say, "I have no money."

"Trust me," he said, "to supply the banquet. Only let me know what you want. A hare, you say?"

"Oh, but you must not poach, Swithun."

"I will not poach. The hare shall be lawfully come by, I promise you. And, if I may dispose of some old things I have found, there will be money to buy all the dainties you require."

"I would fain see what you have found," said Melisent, and together they went to the stables.

Verily rubbed her hands exultantly, her eyebrows in two full half-moons.

"Did I not say Swithun would come to our aid?" she exclaimed to herself. "That young man is a treasure indeed, and would make the most comfortable husband to any maid. If only my heart was na pledged to Jehoram! Alack! will he never come?"

CHAPTER XXI

" Roses is to rule me
  with reason as you will,
For to be still obedient
  your minde for to fulfill ;
And thereto will not disagree
  in nothing that you say ;
But will content your minde truely
  in all things that I may."
A Nosegaie alvvaies Sweet.

MELISENT went into the garden on Friday morning with a heavy heart, for she had a difficult and hateful task to perform, calling for all her tact and courage. The newly-turned brown earth, bathed in April sunshine, smiled at her with promise of fruitfulness to come, but she did not smile back ; for she could see nothing, think of nothing but her errand.

At breakfast her father had told her that it would be necessary, on the coming Monday night, to put Swithun in some kind of livery and set him to wait at table. Accustomed as she was to receiving commands in dutiful silence and obeying them implicitly, Melisent could not resist an exclamation of surprise and protest.

" But Swithun is an outdoor man and gardener, not a serving-man !" she had cried. " He would assuredly be of little use, seeing he is ignorant of such service, even should he consent to do it, which I misdoubt. Do not, I pray, put him to the test, lest he refuse and quit us altogether."

" What then ?" Her father had fixed her in a cold

stare of disapproval. "I will have no servant on my estate who refuses to do my bidding. Let him refuse—and depart. I would have no more of him."

"But—the garden," Melisent had faltered.

"It is easy to get another gardener. Bear him my command, or send him to me, as you will, my daughter."

And Melisent had come into the garden to bear this command to the man she had learned to esteem as one far above his station, whose companionship she had begun to value, whose will and intellect already half dominated her.

The Gardener was digging joyously. To one who has, for many years, been shut within four walls with books, knowing nothing of the lusty pleasure that lies in outdoor labour and the contemplation of Nature's mysterious ways, these mornings were revelations of delight; and to a mind like Swithun's every new fraction of knowledge, every fresh interest, opened wide doors into untravelled realms of thought. The lore he was gaining of horticulture gave him food for reflection and speculation; indeed it would have been difficult to find a subject that would not afford this young man food for speculation! But, truth to tell, he had never expected to find the pursuit so enthralling, or laborious toil so enjoyable, when he had first started upon it. His body seemed to draw as much sustenance from it as his mind.

And so he was whistling gaily at his digging when Melisent drew near with a face full of woe. He did not see her come and for a few minutes she watched him silently, as the crunch of the spade and his tuneful whistle mingled with the fluting of thrush and willow-wren. Then she wished him good-morning, and he

stood up, flushing warmly through his tan and ruddy glow of health.

"I have somewhat to say to you," she began, in a trembling voice, "a message from my father that I am very loath to give . . . oh, Swithun, I hope it will not anger thee."

Her evident distress hurt him. He spoke quickly and with that reassuring smile which, at their first interview, had braced her courage.

"Nothing that you can say will anger me, madam," he declared.

"It is far against my wish, though, that which I have to say," she faltered, "and I do believe it is by advice of the Stranger, for I feel sure my father would never have come to it alone. He would fain have you . . . wait upon us at table next Monday, Swithun, when her ladyship comes to sup with us; for she hath accepted the invitation."

The mischief was out. Her cheeks burned redly and her black lashes fell on them in shame as great as if she had fallen herself into disgrace. Swithun remained for some moments silent. He was slightly angry, much amused and a trifle perplexed at the prospect before him. But above all reigned a great longing and the pain of seeing her pitiful blushes.

"Is that all?" he said, with a laugh. "Well—why not? I have never waited at table, but I think I could do it without blundering, if Verily will give me lessons."

"Oh, Swithun, *would* you?"

He saw her eyes suddenly shine in tears, heard them in her voice, and they made him tremble with a burning desire, either to strangle her in his arms or kill somebody! Nevertheless his voice was quiet, his face smiling as he answered ·

"Most certainly I will. Am I not your man, sworn to your service? Is there anything I could refuse to do for you? Do not distress yourself about it, I pray, for it will not be irksome in the least. I shall enjoy the masquerade. I suppose you have suitable attire for me."

Melisent bit her underlip to still its trembling, and smiled a little under his kindly smiling eyes.

"Yes, there are trunks full of old liveries upstairs," she said. "And you are sure you do not mind! Oh, I am thankful to you, Swithun; you have made me so happy. I feared you might rebel and leave my poor garden to its fate. Believe me Melisent de Paganel can never repay you for your true and willing service."

"I am more than repaid in having so sweet and gracious a lady to serve," he said, in a low, vibrating voice; and their eyes met in a strange yearning gaze. Thereupon Melisent turned and went away.

The Gardener looked after her with dazzled, dreaming eyes. A smile played about his handsome mouth.

"Adorable!" he exclaimed, half aloud, to the robin who had perched upon his spade, ready for the next turn of the earth—"most dear and adorable! Was there ever anyone like her in all romance—so brave, sweet and lovely, so fearful of giving pain? He would be a churl indeed who could refuse her anything."

He fell to digging vigorously, while the robin filled his little beak and flew away. Then he paused again.

"It will mean taking a pretty big risk," he reflected, "but will give me a good opportunity of watching *him*. And what enterprise was ever undertaken without risk? My worst fear is lest I should be tempted to strangle the cur with a dinner-napkin, or pour boiling

soup over his head, as I shall certainly want to do if I see him looking possessively at her, and paying her insolent compliments. Good Lord! what a situation I've landed myself in!"

With a low derisive laugh at the folly of his rash adventure, he set to work in the ground again with his spade and stopped to think no more till the whole patch was turned.

Then he regarded it with the eye of a conqueror, and was glad.

CHAPTER XXII

" For oftentimes the Snake doth lie
with roses ouergrowde :
And vnder fairest flowers,
do noisome Adders lurke :
Of whom take heede, I thee areed ;
lest that thy care they worke.

* * * * *

" Trust not therefore the outward shew ;
beware in anie case :
For good conditions do not lie
where is a pleasant face."

A proper New Song made by a Student in Cambridge.

VERILY, well content with the meats provided by Swithun for Monday's repast, went to the Herb Garden in order to see if any young shoots of mint would serve for her lamb, and did not note she was followed until Mr. Ivo Newman spoke to her, in gentle accents :

" A lovely morning, Verily, and you are looking as fresh as the day."

Verily blushed and dropped her old-world curtsy.

" Good-morning, sir," she simpered, and would have passed on had he not barred her way.

" You are in a great hurry," he observed ; " and that is a pity on this fine Sabbath morn."

" I have to prepare the dinner, sir."

" Never mind the dinner for a few minutes. I want to talk to you. I don't forget that you took me for your sweetheart the day I arrived here. What is his name ?"

" La, sir, what is that to you ?" cried Verily, bridling.

"He has plenty of rivals, I'll swear," said Newman, "and must be a rash man to let you go free so long. Is he not afraid of losing you?"

Verily gave him a side glance from her round eyes, to detect if he meant to flout her. Being reassured by his smile and earnest gaze, she replied, with much dignity:

"He knows better, sir. For I was born Trew, and true have I been for nigh on . . . twenty year."

The pause signified caution and calculation. It was nearly thirty years since the departure of Jehoram, but Verily had decided to be rather less than forty years of age to-day.

"You were born true!" echoed Newman; "and how do you make that out, my good Verily?"

"My family name is Trew, sir,—T R E W, and the Lord decided for me to be extra true, in a way of speaking, by a sort of miracle, through which I got my Chrisom name."

Without a smile, Ivo asked, in his most engaging voice, about the miracle, and Verily plunged into her past family history.

"I was the youngest of twelve, sir, and my poor dear mother was about wore out with us all. What to name me she could na think. There was Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts o' the Apostles, two Timothys, two Marys, Sarah and Elizabeth, and it seemed hard to find any more good names."

"But you don't mean to say," exclaimed Newman, "that they called two in one family by the same name!"

"Why not, sir? One i' the Churchyard, t'other i' the home. Well, as I was saying, the poor soul could na think of any name for me but Diana of the

Ephesians, which father said was heathenish and would provoke the anger of the Lord. He wanted me called Tamesin, but 'twas a name my mother could not abide. And so they waited and waited until the Parson rebuked them for not taking me to the font. And then one night my mother dreamed a dream, and says she the next day to father: 'Let us prick in the Holy Book for the child's name,' which they did thereupon, and it came out clear, as if spoke from Heaven. 'Verily, verily, I say unto you'! Could anything be more plain? 'Twere the Almighty's will that I be christomed Verily, and the knowing of this hath made me faithful all the days of my life."

"I can well believe it," said Newman. "From the first moment I saw you, I knew you were to be trusted, and liked your honest face; though you were not overpleased to see me at first."

Verily looked confused.

"We are not used to visitors in this house, good sir," she faltered, "and there was nothing ready for your entertainment. Mistress Melisent and me we have everything to do, and the dust in the old unused rooms is something to scare you. Furthermore——" She paused abruptly.

"Go on, Verily," he encouraged her, smiling.

"I see no reason why it should be hid, and I will say it," she declared, in a tone of defiance. 'There's little money in this house, save what me and the Mistress do earn between us, for the Master gives us barely enough to keep his own body and soul together and expects to be fed daintily on it. He hath no thought for the young lady, and she would starve, I know, did I not see to it."

"You surprise me," lied Newman, who knew exactly

the state of affairs. "Surely Mr. de Paganel has a good income from the estate. And with such a house as this, chock full of valuable treasures, how could he be poor?"

"You cannot eat and drink valuable treasures, sir," said the good woman dryly. "And 'tis the Master's pride never to let anything go out of this house. As for his estate I know not. I can only say we can barely make both ends meet, e'en wi' no guests in the house. And the young lady hath never had a gown bought at a shop since she be grown up."

"What a shame!" he exclaimed. "Such a beautiful girl ought to be dressed right royally. And what about you, Verily? Who pays your wages?"

"Wages!" she ejaculated, in a tone of wonder, as if she had never thought of the matter before. "Why . . . that is my business, sir. And I tell you, no housekeeper in the land is better paid than I be."

He smiled at the pride in her voice as she uttered the word 'housekeeper,' and knew that she received no wages at all. For this he regarded her as a fool, but, perhaps, felt some compassion, as his next action suggested. Taking a sovereign from his waistcoat pocket, he tendered it to her, saying:

"Well, I've given you a good deal of trouble, Mrs. Housekeeper. Here's something to reward you for your pains."

She shrank, and looked at the money as if it could bite her.

"I do not want your gold, sir."

"Nonsense! We all want gold—anybody's gold we can get," he said, laughing. "Don't be so proud, Verily, but take a well-meant gift in a friendly spirit. It will go to help buy the wedding-gown. When is the happy day to be?"

The money was between her fingers. She gazed at it with a mixture of longing and reluctance. Then she sighed deeply.

"The Lord Almighty knows, sir. My young man's gone to sea."

"The deuce he has! A good many do, I believe. Well, take another, Verily, and forget the name you were born with. You'll lose it at the Altar, any way. Come, is there no one about here you fancy?"

She shook her head. "Nay, I'll be true, sir, if I have to die a maid," she declared.

"That would be a great pity," said Newman blandly; adding, in a thoughtful way: "What about the Gardener, Verily? He seems a likely sort of man, and I dare swear he has an eye on you. Is he not to your taste?"

She looked coy.

"La, sir, he's well enough," she tittered. "I've naught to say against, 'cept that he be a bit young and somewhat too quiet for me."

"Rather a superior young chap, I fancy," said Newman carelessly, though his penetrating eyes were studying her under half-closed lids. "Just a trifle above his station, I should say. What?"

"That he is, sir," averred the innocent Verily, with confidence. "And Mistress Melisent says so herself. He is not the usual kind of gardening man, but hath some education, and knows somewhat of Latin, which the Mistress did set about teaching him till she discovered his learning."

"Teaching him!" cried Newman, with wrinkled brow. "Why should she teach him Latin?"

"'Twas part of the bargain, sir. He was to do the garden for lessons in book-learning."

"And what does a gardener want with book-learning? Tell me that, Verily."

"Truly, sir, I know not," she said: "but Swithun be always poring over books when he hath a moment to spare."

"It looks rather as if he were no gardener at all, but a gentleman in disguise—perhaps a spy," observed Newman meditatively.

Verily suddenly became aware of indiscretion and bit her lip in self-reproach.

"Oh, no, no, sir," she exclaimed earnestly, "nothing of the kind, I do assure you. Swithun's no spy, but a good lad and a hard worker—a better worker, I warrant, than any gentleman ever was or ever will be. Besides, what is there to spy upon here? Believe me, there's many a poor man would be glad to learn a bit outen books, for learning's better than ignorance, sir, any day. As for Swithun's family, I know all about it. His father . . . was a miner up North, as died young and left a widow with a large family to provide for—him being the eldest."

For a person who prided herself on being true, this was rather an amazing effort at fiction and caused Verily much remorse later. It was, of course, wasted on the person intended to be deceived. Newman had pumped some of the knowledge required out of Verily, and was satisfied.

"Well, if anyone should know anything about him, you should, Verily; for you have him all to yourself here," he said; "though I suppose he has long confabs in the garden with your young Mistress. No doubt they have much to talk over."

"There be much to talk of in the doing of a garden, sir," replied Verily, shutting her lips tightly, resolved

not to be betrayed into any further revelations about Swithun.

"Exactly. But now listen to me, Verily. We are good friends I hope, you and I, so I will confide something in you, if you will promise secrecy. Have I your word not to divulge what I tell you?"

"I can make no promises, sir, but if there be no harm——"

"There is no harm. I am here to try and improve the fortunes of this ancient family, and I have my suspicions about the Gardener. Watch him well, Verily, and if you see anything suspicious about him—anything that shows him not to be what he pretends to be, you understand, let me know. I'll make it worth your while. There's more gold where the last came from."

Verily gazed at him with eyes that seemed to grow rounder and rounder. A process of reasoning worked itself out in her somewhat slow mind, and presently she asked:

"It seems to me, sir, that ye are bribing me to spy on Kit Swithun; and if so, you are come to the wrong stall. What should I find out about the lad more than I ha' told you already? And what do you mean by trying to breed suspicion in my mind about one who hath ever treated me well? I'll ha' none o' your gold."

She lifted up her figured chintz skirt and fished from a deep pocket underneath it the sovereign Newman had given her, holding it out to him between her finger and thumb gingerly, with an expression on her face of mingled regret and defiance. Heaven knows how many years had passed since Verily had possessed a pound of her own!

"Foolish girl!" said Newman tenderly, pushing it away from him. "Why do you suspect me of harm? Haven't I told you my one desire is to befriend this family? Be sensible, Verily, and ask yourself if it is likely I should try to bribe a faithful soul like you against those you love. All I want to know about the Gardener is whether he is really a gardener or a gentleman in disguise. I have an idea—perhaps I ought not to mention it, but you can keep a secret—I've every reason to think he is a lord's son I knew once, who deserted from the army. That's all. It's no business of mine, Only I am curious to know. But don't let it trouble you. It is of no consequence."

"Deserted the army!" Verily ejaculated, shocked. "Well now, and I did hear someone say he walked like a soldier. And what would they do to him, sir, an they caught him? Would he be shot?"

"No, no. Don't be afraid, my girl. I would not give him up to justice, anyway, I promise you. We're friends, aren't we, Verily? Give me a kiss and tell me so."

Verily blushed and simpered. It was long since she had been kissed by a man, poor soul! and she loved kisses. Nevertheless she made a brave show and protested coyly: "For shame, sir, fie, fie!" as he brushed her cheek with his moustache, thinking: "She's safe. I have her fast." Then he gave her broad waist a gentle hug and left her in a state of blushing beatitude.

She was very silent at dinner that day, but as Swithun's mind was full of engrossing thoughts he did not notice the unwonted repose of her busy tongue. At last she asked abruptly:

"What is the punishment for a soldier that runs away, Swithun?"

Her eyes scrutinized him severely. He met them with frankness.

"Imprisonment, I suppose. Why do you ask?"

"For knowledge. Hast ever been drilled, Swithun? You stand so upright, though your neck do stoop a bit when you sit."

"Does it? I must look to that. Do you think your young lady would ever condescend to fence with me, Verily?"

"You haven't answered my question," she persisted, still watching him.

"Have I been drilled? Surely. I was in a cadet corps at school and a volunteer corps at col . . . I mean later on. What more do you wish to know?"

"Naught," she replied, feeling much relieved. He appeared so entirely unconscious of any under-current to her inquiries. "But tell me, Swithun, what do you think of the Stranger, Mr. Newman? Is he a nice gentleman, think you, and worthy of our young lady?"

Swithun started and a swift light sprang into his dark eyes.

"What do you mean, Verily? Why do you ask that?" he said.

"Because I would fain know your judgment of him," she answered. And, as she thought of the kiss in the Herb Garden, a simper began to spread over her face. Swithun, intent on his own thoughts, did not notice it.

"Do you suggest that Miss de Paganel could possibly regard with favour such a——" He paused for a word.

"I know not how she regards him, Swithun, but that he hath an eye to her I dare swear. And a cinder fell out o' the fire this morning that looked uncommonly like a purse. If he brought her fortune——"

"What do *you* think of him?" interposed Swithun, turning upon her suddenly with a penetrating look. "Do you like him, Verily? Do you *trust* him?"

She hesitated a moment, and shifted her eyes.

"Do you?" he reiterated.

"No," she said at last bluntly: "I cannot tell thee why, Swithun, but I like him not, though he hath been generous to me and——"

"What is that?" Swithun spoke sharply. "He has given you money, Verily."

Her eyes fell. "I shall crack if I tell nobody," she said, and began to fumble with her gown. Drawing forth the sovereign, which she had knotted in her handkerchief, she laid it before the young man, saying: "He did give me this but a few hours since, Swithun, and said it was for the trouble he had caused me. Oh, he's a very fair-spoken gentleman, I do confess, and yet I trust him not. For he told me lies, Kit, and I told him lies, too. May God ha' mercy on my soul! I never told one before in all my life, but I did it in defence o' you. Yes—I will say it, for although he would ha' me promise secrecy, I made no promise. And I tell thee he hath suspicions o' thee, lad, and required of me to find out all I could about thee. He said he would give me more gold if I could discover aught, and he did speak me fair, and——" Here she stopped and blushed, wishing to tell of the kiss and daring not. It was surely a shocking outrage on her modesty and fidelity, shocking but very thrilling all the same!

"And what was his suspicion of me?" asked Swithun, without noticing her confusion.

"That you was a soldier, a lord's son, who ran away."

Swithun threw back his head, and laughed till the rafters rang.

"And how do you know it was a lie, Verily?" he said, when he could command his gravity.

"Because I know thou'rt a true man and would not deceive us so. Tell me now plain and straight—hast ever been a soldier?"

"Never."

"There!" she exclaimed, in a tone of triumph.

"And what lie did you tell about me?" he inquired.

"Lord forgi' me! I said thou wert a miner's son from the North, and one of a large family," she faltered. "It was because he suspected thee of being a gentleman spy, Swithun, and I would make thee out a true man; though both the Mistress and I do believe thou'rt gentle, if poor, and not come o' labouring folk."

"A spy! That is good. He suspects me of being a spy; does he? And a deserter. What else?"

"Naught else, Swithun, please you. But he hath a glozing tongue. Very nearly did I believe him. Yet I would not spy on thee, Swithun, for all the gold o' the Indies, and that did I tell him straight."

"You're a treasure!" declared Swithun. "So you sent him about his business, good Verily."

She hung her head. "He was very honey-tongued, and did take me by storm," she said: "I never thought what he would be at, Kit, I do assure you, and nobody could ha' been more surprised than me when he——"

She paused, hung her head lower, blushed more deeply. Swithun whistled.

"What, you don't mean to tell me," he said, "that the scoundrel dared——"

"He did, Swithun," she whispered.

"And you such a model of constancy! Verily, I am astounded! You let him——"

"Not willingly, I swear," protested Verily eagerly. "I did not want his kisses, nor his money either, God wot! You wrong me, Swithun; by my faith I swear" —tears began to well up in her eyes—"I would ha' no kisses but those o' my lawful man. Thou know'st, Kit, I ha' never led thee on, nor encouraged any familiarity. And as for the filthy lucre that moth and rust doth corrupt, 'twas not for myself I kept it, but for the dear young lady's sake, to help in the hour of debt, at the which she grieveth so. What good is gold to me?" And the tears streamed down her ruddy face.

Swithun stood over her and patted her shoulder gently.

"There, there, good girl, don't cry," he said softly. "I could never think any harm of you, Verily, nor could anyone who knew you. There was never a better woman in the world, and we all know it. What's a stolen kiss? Nobody thinks anything of it. There are better days in store. Your cinder that hopped out of the fire looked like a purse; didn't it? I believe in that cinder and the purse. Not in Ivo Newman's purse, though. He can keep that in his pocket. You're not to be bribed, Verily. I would as soon try to bribe the Stone Dragon."

Verily dried her tears, comforted.

"Thou wilt not tell the Mistress what I've told thee," she said. "'Twould greatly afflict her."

"Be sure that I would die rather than afflict her," he replied emphatically.

"If only thou wert a gentleman, Kit, and could wed our Honeysweet!" she sighed.

"And so say I, with all my heart," he declared, as he went out into the Court-yard.

"Poor lad! Thy fate is hard," quoth Verily to herself, looking after him pitifully. "For thou hast a true heart, I'll be sworn, and will love but once, as I do."

Sighing deeply she began to take up the plates and dishes, in an absent fashion, for her mind travelled over the exciting scenes of the morning.

It was not until she found herself washing up over the sink, that her usual habit came to her aid and she began to croon some lines from her favourite "Nosegaie always sweet" that seemed appropriate to the situation. And she thought of Newman and the kiss, of Jehoram and his kisses, till her cheeks glowed again, as she sang:

"'Fenel is for flatterers,
an evil thing it is sure,
But I have always meant true*ly*
with constant heart and pure;
And will continue in the same
as long as life doth last,
Still hoping for a joyful day
when all our paines be past.'"

CHAPTER XXIII

" O Love, they wrong thee much
That say thy sweet is bitter :
When thy rich fruit is such
That nothing can be sweeter.
Fair house of joy and bliss,
Where truest pleasure is,
I do adore thee.
I know thee where thou art,
I serve thee with my heart
And fall before thee."

Tobias Hume.

MELISENT sat in the Dragon's Court with her hands folded idly in her lap. This was a sure sign that Sunday had come, the only day marked in her busy life by its few hours of leisure. It was her sole way of marking it. Both she and Verily had long ceased going to Church, and the neighbouring clergy had long since left off remonstrating with her father on this account. An offer of religious training for her from the nearest Roman Catholic priest in the district, a pleasant man in charge of a small Church in a small neighbouring market-town, had been courteously declined by Mr. de Paganel some years before, and there the matter had rested. The only time that the girl and Verily had gone to the village Church, the stares, nudges, and remarks of the congregation had so disconcerted them that nothing would have induced either of them to go again. There was some excuse for the villagers. The garb of the two visitors from Paganel Garth would have created a sensation any-

where, and this sleepy village was unused to new sensations of any kind. But to Verily and Melisent, who thought the attire of the people round them far more startling than their own (as it was certainly less becoming), the rude reception had no excuse. Both felt humiliated and indignant, while Verily was furious, and made free with her comments thereon to the amused tradesmen that week. Melisent had scarcely been outside the gate since.

Before breakfast every Sunday morning she and Verily went into the Chapel, to murmur together, over their beads, the Latin prayers of the Missal, and Melisent tried to imagine the ceremony of the Mass she had never known, worshipping, in her own ardent way at the shrine of her mother's tomb. Sunday with her was usually a day of resigned melancholy; the idleness she enforced upon herself gave her too much time for thinking, and the hours were often oppressed with vague longings that seemed destined never to be fulfilled. Who that has known the heart and mind of a young maid does not know also the anxious yearning pain that lonely, unoccupied hours can bring her? And Melisent was a peculiarly imaginative, emotional, even passionate, girl. In her nature were combined strange elements of earth and fire, which her active but untrained intelligence could not always dominate. She might have become morbid had not her time been always occupied.

On this April Sunday she was not melancholy. She sat looking at the Dragon with her red lips parted in a smile so sweet that it might almost have melted the stone beast into feeling! Her robe was of some soft stuff that had once been white but had taken on the yellowish hue of age, and it was confined at the

waist by a fringed Oriental scarf of many colours. In a freak of her ever-changing humour she had allowed her hair to fall in two thick plaits almost to her knees, drawn together at the nape of her neck with a string of seed-pearls. A few wild daffodils were tucked into the kerchief that was folded over her shoulders and bosom ; her feet were encased in yellow satin mules of French manufacture, daintily embroidered and hardly soiled. She made a delectable picture there, with her borage-tinted eyes full of dancing light and her skin like apple-blossom.

A letter lay on her lap. She took it up and read it for the fourth time.

"Sir Christopher Manwood presents his compliments and thanks to Mr. de Paganel and Miss de Paganel for their gracious invitation to sup on the 28th May, which he is unhappily prevented from accepting. He desires to express his extreme regret and the hope that he may have the honour of renewing his acquaintance with Mr. and Miss de Paganel at no very distant date."

There was nothing in this, to the ordinary mind, that could convey a sense of romance, but to Melisent it had the power of calling up visions. Her faint remembrance of the young man revived and brought with it a past sensation of adoring childhood at the foot of adult youth. In those early days she had thought Christopher Manwood a very paladin, not only because he could ride and shoot and play cricket, but because he was learned in books of history and could tell wonderful stories ; also, perhaps, because of his extreme kindness to the small girl who sat on a stool at his feet worshipping his bigness, strength, and

cleverness. Since then the baby passion had waned away, for childish memories are short, and after Christopher went to Cambridge she saw him no more. The bearded portrait she had seen of him, at Oakwood Hall, fulfilled no promise of that handsome boyhood, in her eyes, for to all young girls beards are elderly and unromantic. But the news that came to her of his progressive march towards fame, of his book that had been published by the Royal Society, of the scientific honours awarded to him, made him loom rather large and heroic in her eyes. Thus the letter before her was an object of great interest, a friendly pat from a lion's paw, something to be cherished and awaken sleeping fancies.

The handwriting of the letter had something so vigorous and individual about it that she felt almost as if Sir Christopher were there before her.

"Oh, that he were coming to-morrow!" she breathed. "How good it would be to hear him talk, and learn something from his great knowledge!"

But even as the thought rose in her mind it was checked by another. She would not have Sir Christopher see Kit Swithun in the garb of a lackey. Why this idea was repugnant to her she could not have explained, but so it was. She felt curiously humiliated at the prospect of seeing him, in a footman's garb, serving dishes to Lady Manwood and Ivo Newman; but it would be worse still, she felt, in the presence of Sir Christopher.

She was reading the letter once more when a footstep made her look up and she saw the Gardener standing by.

"Forgive my intrusion, madam," he said, "but I thought it might be well to prune these bushes before

they advance too far this warm Spring. May I do so now, without interrupting you ?"

He held a pruning-knife open in his hand. She looked at him dreamily, thinking: "Why do men wear ugly beards to hide their faces," and contrasting his strong, clean-shaven chin with the picture of a bearded man in cap and gown she had in her mind. She said aloud, with assumed gravity, though her eyes still danced: "Swithun, it is not meet to work on a Sunday. You must rest to-day, and should go to Church."

"It is rest to me to cut these branches, and Church to be out here in Nature's Sanctuary. Who could nourish an evil thought here? Haven't we the choristers singing their hymns and psalms? What incense could be sweeter than the breath of flowers?"

She smiled on him. "You are, I think, a poet, Swithun," she said.

"Your ladyship is the first to discover the fact," he replied. And this was true.

"We have had a letter from Sir Christopher Manwood," she said, after a pause, "and he cannot come on Monday. I did not think he would. Why should he come all the way from London to see us?"

London, albeit not thirty miles from Hernspool, seemed very far away to Melisent.

"You will be glad," Swithun remarked carelessly.

"I—glad!" She forgot she had expressed a hope, but three days before, that Sir Christopher would not come. "Nay, indeed, I am rather sorry than glad, for I should have liked to meet him again—although I am afeard of him," she added, laughing.

"I should be glad to see him, too," said Swithun, "for Verily talks so much about the gentleman that

she makes me more than commonly interested in him."

"Doth Verily talk so much about him?" asked Melisent, in some surprise. "What doth she say of him, Swithun?"

"That he is a miracle of learning, but a fool," was the surprising answer. Melisent lifted her piquant chin indignantly.

"A fool! Verily calls him a fool! I'll not believe it, Swithun. She could not speak so rudely and falsely of one whose great talents are well known. Why, he is the cleverest, the most——"

"But yet a fool, she says, because he does not demand his own house, cast out his stepmother and take unto himself a wife, as a wise man should."

They smiled together over this characteristic verdict of Verily's.

"Verily is mad on one subject," said Melisent.

"I quite agree with her," said Swithun.

"But why should he marry if he be content a bachelor?" she cried. "Perchance he hath not seen any maiden he could wed."

"Verily declares that, if he had any sense, he would cast an eye on the damsels in his own country, where, as she most truthfully affirms, there is both high birth and beauty to be found, and within reasonable distance of Oakwood Hall," quoth Swithun, with a meaning glance.

The apple-blossom tint of Melisent's face deepened to rose.

"Verily is an old ninny! She thinks her own . . . the maidens of her own county are far beyond all the beauties of London and the great world. You should not encourage her nonsense, Swithun."

"But, again, I agree with her," he maintained stoutly. "I, too, think Sir Christopher has been a fool to imagine he could find happiness in books and science, when he might have been learning a far deeper, and sweeter, lore. A doubly-distilled fool!" he concluded, with emphasis.

"I know nothing of the lore you speak of," she murmured with eyes downcast.

"The lore of love," he said simply, watching her.

The Dragon gave vent to a soft hollow murmur, and a thrush on the laburnum hard by vociferated, "He'll do it, he'll do it!" in a loud, clear voice. A purple and orange butterfly settled on a dandelion at Melisent's feet, and a velvet humble-bee droned in the daisies. Her eyes grew soft and pensive, as she said demurely:

"I have read of such lore in books, but I thought it was out of the fashion now."

"Only with fools," said Swithun. "Wise men keep it always in fashion."

Thereupon fell a long silence in the Court of the Dragon. The purple and orange butterfly flew away, but the thrush still sang, "Do it, do it, do it!" insistently.

"Tell me," said Swithun, coming to the lady's side and looking down upon her exquisitely tinted face. "If Sir Christopher came to teach you that lore, how would you receive him? With coldness or kindness?"

"With kindness," she answered quickly, amazed at the question. And then, at sight of the strange thing in his eyes, her own fell and her face was like a rose again.

"He'll come to see you!" sang the thrush, with such obvious conviction that the fact seemed indisputable.

"And when he does come," said Swithun, turning to the bushes and pruning vigorously, "it will be time for me to depart."

"Oh, I hope not," she exclaimed impulsively. "Why do you say that, Swithun? I do not understand."

Even while she spoke a swift comprehension of what might be his meaning made her tremble.

"Do you think I would stay here to see him pay court to you?" Swithun said, still with his face from her, to hide the smile on his lips; "though, for the matter of that I would liefer see him than any other man." Which was scrupulously true.

"Swithun!" exclaimed Melisent, rising with a haughty lift of her head.

"Than Mr. Ivo Newman, for example," he pursued, without turning round. "Verily believes that he has designs upon you and that your—the Master—favours them."

"Verily should know better than to talk of my affairs with you," said Melisent passionately.

Her anger bordered on distress. He saw it was the kind of anger that the will imposes, founded on a conception of dignity.

"Tell me one thing," he pleaded, facing round upon her, "and I will ask no more: Does Mr. Newman find any favour in your sight? Can he succeed in winning you?"

"I do not see that you have a right to question me so," she declared with spirit.

"I have not," said Swithun.

"You——" She paused irresolutely. Their eyes met; again that strange tangled gaze, as if they could not tear apart.

"Mr. Newman does not please me," she said at last, abruptly.

"I see you laughing and talking with him gaily enough."

"He is amusing."

"And soon he will become interesting, and then absorbing, and then——"

"Never in this world, Swithun. That is one reason why I would fain have seen him beside Sir Christopher, who is a true gentleman, so I might learn why Mr. Newman doth not please me."

"But Sir Christopher is not coming and Mr. Newman will be there, to amuse, to flatter——"

"Swithun, you do forget yourself and presume too much," she cried, her starry eyes flashing, her head held high. There was a tremulous ring in her voice.

"It is quite true. I do forget myself," he answered humbly; and his voice also had the same tremulous ring. "I can think of nothing but you . . . madam. And a clown may surely worship a Queen, without peril to her dignity. Forgive, this once, my presumption. I will remember my place in future and try not to offend again."

She looked at him with softening eyes, then turned and gazed dreamily at the Dragon.

"I do . . . not . . . think . . . I was truly offended with thee, Swithun," she said slowly.

"Sweet! Sweet! Sweet! Sweet!" sang the thrush in rapture.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Our Life is like a curious play,
Where each man hideth from himself.
'Let us be open as the day,'
One mask doth to the other say,
That he may better hide himself."

Old Manuscript.

LADY MANWOOD received a decided shock when the great nail-studded front door of Paganel Garth was opened to her by one of the most magnificent flunkeys she had ever seen. Gorgeous in violet plush and gold shoulder-knots, with embroidered white satin waistcoat, silken hose and well-powdered Georgian wig, his eyebrows artificially darkened, his cheeks raddled, Swithun held himself up to the fullest height of his five feet eleven inches and looked much taller. His dignified manner, low soft voice and drawn-down upper lip made him a model of footmanly decorum.

Taken aback and full of wondering curiosity, as she was, the lady showed no sign of astonishment, but met his splendid manner and appearance with a matching hauteur amounting to majesty, as she handed him her wraps without so much as a glance at his face. It is well known that no true high-born lady is ever more than barely aware of the presence of a servant, and that a man-servant, especially, is to her only a kind of automaton, minus thought or feeling, a passive receptacle for orders!

Swithun had often mentally commented on this fact, with some sense of amusement, and he was now able to put his observations to practical use. He led the ladies to the Dame's Parlour, all swept and garnished, with Melisent's loom well out of sight. The room was lighted by many candles and graced by many flowers, whose arrival that morning with boxes of sweetmeats and other dainties—a surprise gift from Ivo Newman—had filled Melisent with delight. She was all flushed and dimpling with smiles as she welcomed Lady Manwood in the pretty fashion of a past era, dropping a curtsy and kissing her hand. She had not known how to receive her guest, having never before had occasion to do so, and she was too proud to ask her father or Ivo Newman. So, after much discussion with Verily, who knew as little of modern etiquette as herself, and after poring over an ancient *Boke of Manneres*, Melisent resolved on her course and took it. Lady Manwood's romantic fancy was enchanted. She threw off all ceremony on the instant, and embraced the lovely girl.

"You dear child!" she exclaimed effusively. "How lovely you have grown, and how tall! You make me feel a perfect pigmy. Why, I have scarcely seen you since you have grown up. We must not be such strangers again. It was sweet of you and your father to ask me, when I know how few visitors are received here. I am most flattered. Will you believe this is the first time I have been inside your beautiful old home since—oh, I can't remember when! What treasures you have here! This tapestry—how delightfully quaint! Is it not charming, Agnes?"

Miss Tucker assented with enthusiasm and they made a tour of the room, while Melisent lighted them

with a sconce of candles. After exhausting every adjective at her disposal, Lady Manwood turned to Melisent again and raved about her dress. It was a gown of white tabby silk, embroidered with roses, worn over a petticoat of gold brocade, in the Georgian fashion; the bodice cut in a low square at the neck and laced across a chemisette of beautiful old lace, sewn with seed-pearls. Her father had found a string of pearls for her neck, and she wore in her hair, dressed high, a single crimson rose, fastened by a brooch of garnets quaintly set in silver wire. She was blushing under Lady Manwood's exuberant admiration when Swithun again flung open the door with a flourish to admit Mr. de Paganel.

He, too, was attired after the fashion of a past day, but very simply; in black velvet, with fine lace ruffles to his embroidered shirt, and a sparkle of old paste buttons and buckles. His greeting of Lady Manwood gave Melisent assurance, for it was like her own—a low bow and salutation of the hand. Ivo Newman in modern evening dress, looked insignificant beside him, for Godwin de Paganel had an air of distinction against which ordinary men appeared clownish. Lady Manwood grew visibly nervous as she received his compliments and cordial welcome to his house. It seemed, from the moment in which he entered the room, as if there were no other person in it save himself and the lady to whom he devoted his attention. His greeting to Miss Tucker had been equally courteous and charming; but from that moment he ignored her.

Swithun in stentorian tones announced that supper was served. Mr. de Paganel would never allow any other word to be used for the evening meal. "Queen

Elizabeth," he would say, "dined at twelve o'clock and supped at night. I am satisfied to follow the example of the greatest monarch England has known."

Melisent had much ado not to smile at Swithun's superb assumption of flunkeyism. She and Verily had put the finishing touches to his attire with peals of laughter; indeed Melisent could not remember when she had laughed so much in all her life! It was a delicious jest to see him practising his manners before them, while Verily instructed him as to the proper waiting at table. And although the jest had a sore side to it, now that Melisent saw him actually treated as a man-servant, she could hardly help smiling at his supernaturally solemn demeanour. The drawn-down upper lip made him so unlike himself, so irresistibly funny!

Verily had repeatedly warned him not to lose his head when the great ones asked for anything. "I ha' seen," she admonished him, "servants who knew not whether they were on their heels or their heads, a-serving mint sauce wi' fish, instead o' hot butter, and pouring wine all over the lady's fallals."

Swithun promised to avoid these pitfalls and remember all her instructions. Now that the time had come he certainly seemed to be a marvel of propriety, moving with silent steps and offering dishes with great gentleness. Melisent dared not look at him, but was acutely conscious of his presence all the while. She sat opposite her father at the oval gate-legged table, with Ivo Newman on her right hand side and Lady Manwood on her left, while Miss Tucker sat on the left of her host.

"The only shadow that falls upon me at this happy moment," said Mr. de Paganel, "is regret for

the absence of Sir Christopher, who would have rounded our small party to perfect completion."

"I am sure he would say that the loss was all on his side," responded Lady Manwood, with the beaming smile that was but an expansion of her ordinary amiable expression. "In a letter I received from him this morning he expresses the greatest regret that he is unable to be present. But he is on the track of a new discovery and very much engaged."

Mr. de Paganel smiled. "New! Is anything new in the material universe?" he queried.

"Surely *you* do not doubt the possibility of new *ideas*," said Ivo Newman, and the eyes of the two men met in a glance of understanding.

"Ideas—ah, that is another matter. Ideas are the illimitable property of the spirit and have naught to do with material things, which are fixed in their elements and can change but in form. That which men call 'a new discovery' is merely the resolving of those elements (whose nature hath existed since the world began) under the transcendent creative light of genius. For mind is your sole transmuter; invention and discovery are but the metamorphoses of thought into reality."

"Excellently defined!" cried Newman.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Lady Manwood, with an adoring look.

"How true!" murmured Miss Tucker, impressed.

Nothing ever impresses mediocre minds so much as inflated nonsense, dressed in fine language; for to these the grandiloquent always seems the profound. And the more tangled, the more inextricably confused the thought, the deeper does it appear to them!

"You are really too metaphysical for us ordinary

mortals, dear Mr. de Paganel," Lady Manwood declared. "Do you not agree with me, Mr. Newman, that it is positively criminal of him to bury himself here, to hide his remarkable intellect under a bushel?"

"There are some things that cannot for long remain hidden," was the answer, "and if you are patient, Lady Manwood, you will yet see our friend shine like a star in the firmament of public opinion."

Their host was gazing at the candles in a lost and dreamy way, trying to impress upon his memory the flash of genius to which he had just given vent and wondering vaguely whether he might, without a breach of etiquette, send for his tablets.

Melisent listened, full of wonder. Was her father really so remarkably gifted? Was the thought that he had just uttered so profound? If not, and her reason whispered a doubt, why did these people flatter him so?

As there was a pause, she ventured on a shy question.

"Doth Sir Christopher tell to anyone the nature of his new discovery, or is it yet a secret?"

"It is a secret so far as *I* am concerned," replied Lady Manwood. "He is so wrapped up in his dry studies and dusty old books that I hear from him very seldom. His mind, you know, is of a very different order from that of your brilliant father, and concerned only with material things. Dear fellow as he is, his soul never rises above the chemical laboratory."

As she spoke in a tone of airy patronage, not unmixed with some contempt, Lady Manwood's eyes encountered a pair that were shining with suppressed amusement, those of the man-servant who stood behind Mr. de Paganel's chair. She started and stared hard at him for a few moments. Then, as he turned away to the sideboard, she bent and murmured to Melisent:

"Do you know, your man bears the most absurd resemblance to Sir Christopher, about the eyes and nose. Is it not strange?"

"But Sir Christopher hath a beard."

"He has, and is plainer featured than your servant, besides being much shorter. Nevertheless, I certainly saw a vague and fleeting likeness just now."

Here Godwin de Paganel became alive once more to his duties as host and turned a face of apologetic sweetness upon Lady Manwood.

"Dear lady, I know not how to express my sense of shame," he said, "for having fallen into the realm of thought so long and left you in silence. Nothing but your excessive goodness could pardon such neglect."

"I can pardon that far better than your neglect of your own dinner," she replied, with a caressing look and accent. "See, you have eaten nothing yet. Oh! you clever men, how you need to be looked after! I dare swear that there are days on which you positively live almost on air, when you abstract yourself in that realm of thought, of which you spoke just now. Is it not so?"

De Paganel, who had an exceedingly good, if fastidious, appetite, tried to word his denial of this charge in such a manner as to convey the exact opposite.

"Nay indeed," he said: "I eat quite sufficient for my daily needs. He who enjoys his food with gross appetite soon becomes a mere clod."

"But we must not neglect our poor bodies," declared Lady Manwood, "or our souls would soon have to quit them. Ah! if I had the care of such a remarkable man, my one study would be to see that he did not neglect himself, as genius is too apt to do."

The tender familiarity of her tone struck Melisent

strangely and gave her a curious sensation of discomfort. For the first time she realized that her father was a man, and not an old man, a fact which, when it dawns upon the consciousness of a young daughter, always comes as a shock. She sat silent and wondering to the end of the meal, while Ivo Newman rattled to Miss Tucker, and her father kept up a low dialogue with Lady Manwood. Now and then, when no one was observing her, Melisent stole a look at Swithun, who stood at the sideboard receiving Verily's whispered directions. His back looked so queer in his gorgeous garments that she could scarcely keep a smile from her lips, and she could so well imagine Verily's quaintly worded suggestions and commands.

From the wainscoted walls looked out the portraits of dead and gone de Paganels, with the trophies of their prowess in hunting, crumbling antlers of horned beasts. And from the Musicians' Gallery who knows what ghosts were watching the feast, vibrating and communing in their fleshless way upon this unwonted sight. For it was many years since the dining-hall had been used for banqueting, and there floated in its musty atmosphere that peculiar chill and sense of mystery which may be felt in places where the dead have been wont to assemble in times long past, and where the talk and laughter of to-day are never heard. The air seems to be impregnated with an essence of bygone mortality, a fine dust of old memories, old joys, old sorrows, old passions. Of this many persons are quite unconscious, but to some of us it is as real as the scent of violets in warm air, or the soft caress of the west wind. And so it was to Melisent. She could almost see vague forms in the shadowy corners, hear the music of far-away lute and viol in the Gallery, and feel the

cold touch of spirit hands. But apparently she alone had these fancies. Newman, who had been acutely aware of the uncanny atmosphere on his arrival, when he had been shut up alone in one of the unused rooms, was apparently oblivious to it now and exerted himself to make merriment for the small party.

Miss Tucker talked and laughed genteelly; Mr. de Paganel and Lady Manwood spoke together in low tones. By the time wine was flowing, geniality warmed the chill currents of the room, and Melisent was the only one at the table ill at ease. She felt the sadness of the old ghosts; she felt the humiliation of Swithun's position, and the sight of her father's absorption in Lady Manwood continued to afford her vague uneasiness. She was grateful to Newman for sustaining a pitch of gaiety that kept *ennui* from the table, and yet she half resented his effervescence, so at variance with her own spirits. He tried to draw her into a three-cornered conversation, in vain; but he was able to make her laugh more than once, and Melisent's laugh was very spontaneous.

Swithun, watching at the side, felt his heart contract when he heard it, and saw her drink wine with Newman. He fancied he saw their fingers touch as they clinked glasses, and a most irrational desire to seize Newman by the throat possessed him, giving a sad shock to his self-esteem, for he had believed himself superior to such primitive emotions. It was the first time he had seen Melisent on good terms with the interloper at close quarters. It was likewise the first time he had come face to face with himself!

The supper being over, Lady Manwood begged to spend some time in the famous Library and declared herself to be enchanted with Mr. de Paganel's mar-

vellous collection of books, upon which, however, she bestowed but scanty attention. Drawing her host into an alcove as far as possible away from the others, she engaged him in earnest conversation, keeping her voice too low to be heard by the three who sat at a farther end of the big room.

Here Ivo Newman played his part well, and aided the fulfilment of her designs by starting an animated discussion on love ancient and modern, an irresistible theme to the two innocent women who listened to his light cynical talk with profound interest. His flowing and piquant diction, the many and varied experiences he chronicled in different parts of the earth, impressed them vastly with his cleverness and knowledge.

Miss Tucker, who, as we have learnt before, had opinions of her own (though she kept them carefully concealed from Lady Manwood), engaged eagerly in a discussion as to whether modern love had any of those elements of chivalry and devotion which distinguished the tender passion in past days, while Melisent listened, with glowing cheeks and eyes more than ever like blue stars, to their views upon a subject she knew only through old books, a subject that had always seemed to her as sacred as religion. Her cheeks burned at many of their irreverent conclusions, and at any narration of a personal experience she felt as if she must run away. Yet the dialogue thrilled her, as only something with a spice of horror can thrill!

Swithun, bringing coffee into the Library (a course that had been suggested by Newman as modish and pleasant) noted, with sharp eyes, how near the young man sat to Melisent and how earnestly her eyes were fixed upon his face. But he made no sign, 'stepping lightly as a panther' and waiting in stiff patience by

Mr. de Paganel's chair while that gentleman discoursed to Lady Manwood upon the folly of casting pearls before swine, one of his favourite subjects.

The Library was all warmth and soft lamplight, with deep shadows in its corners and alcoves, fragrant with the scent of coffee and burnt logs on the hearth. The musty odour of the old books for once was overpowered. Time fled quickly and it was nearly midnight before Lady Manwood exclaimed, with a little affected start, as she glanced at her jewelled watch, that it was dreadfully late and she was quite ashamed of herself for inflicting so many hours of her company upon Mr. de Paganel.

He swore that her watch must be wrong and that the hour could be no later than ten; protesting that her company had made him forget the lapse of time.

"And we have never had our game of piquet," she cried regretfully.

"That is for another day," he said. "To-night hath been better spent in the fusing of our immanent ideas. It is rarely I find so much sympathy."

"But surely your daughter——" she murmured, with downcast eyes.

"Is but a child, in mind as well as years; and, like all young creatures, entirely engrossed in herself," he responded blandly. "I do not complain. I have lived too much alone to feel the need of companionship. Yet when I am blessed with it, as to-night, I do most fully appreciate the privilege."

He raised her hand to his lips. Lady Manwood simpered and said nothing.

But she thought, despite her affected regret, that the game she had played that night had been more exciting than piquet!

CHAPTER XXV

" Shepherd, what's love, I pray thee tell ?
It is that fountain and that well
Where pleasure and repentance dwell ;
It is perhaps that sauncing bell
That tolls all into heaven or hell ;
And this is love, as I heard tell."

Sir Walter Raleigh.

GODWIN DE PAGANEL handed Lady Manwood to her carriage in great state, Miss Tucker following, while Swithun held the door open for them. Melisent remained behind in the Library with Ivo Newman.

" How charming it is to watch a middle-aged romance !" he observed, as soon as the others had gone.

Melisent gave a start.

" I do not understand," she responded, and the faintness of her voice showed that she was not speaking with her usual honesty.

" Your perfectly unique and delightful father is apparently fathoms deep in love with the agreeable little widow who makes such devouring eyes at him," he said, laughing. " It is easy to see how it will all end if Lady Manwood has her way."

Melisent shivered slightly. The air of the Library seemed to have grown suddenly cold.

" My father . . . in love !" she faltered, gazing at Newman with such distressed eyes that he felt some compunction.

" A temporary emotion, no doubt," he remarked.

"Mr. de Paganel has escaped the designs of the fair sex so long that he will not, doubtless, fall an easy prey. But if he did—why so much the better. It would be all to your advantage. The estates join, or did join until your father disposed of his land; the lady is well off, and——"

"I would rather not parley of a matter so private and concerning my father alone," said Melisent, with much dignity and a rising colour, devoutly wishing that someone would enter and relieve her from this *tête-à-tête*.

"You are quite right. Forgive me. Why should we concern ourselves in the affairs of others, when our own are so much more interesting? It is a waste of precious moments. And I have been longing all the evening to tell you how lovely, how perfectly enchanting you look to-night, in that low-cut gown with the pearls round your delicious neck."

There was a look in his eyes that affrighted her strangely. Their glance roved over her, bold without candour, half-closed but intense, calling up the hot blood full gallop to her delicate face. She rose in sudden panic. He seized her hand.

"Don't be angry with me for speaking the truth," he pleaded, taking the other hand and holding her fast. "You must not go till I have spoken. It is not polite to leave me in the middle of a speech—you, my hostess! Why do you always freeze me, Millicent? What have I done to merit such cold looks, such constant shrinking from me? Am I so objectionable to you that you cannot bear my presence? If so, it will be best to tell me plainly and I will never trouble you again. Tell me, why do you fear and hate me?"

There was a genuine ring of distress in his peculiarly soft voice that touched the girl.

"Oh, no, no indeed, it is not that. I do not fear or hate you," she averred. "You have been always agreeable, and your kind gift of this morning made me very happy. Believe me, I am not ungrateful—but——" She paused, at a loss for words.

"But!" he echoed. "Where does that 'but' lead us—you beautiful girl? To heaven or hell for me?"

She felt his influence creeping over her like a spell and could make but a feeble struggle against it.

"You affright me . . . I do not understand you," she panted: "I have no reason to dislike . . . to object, but I am not used——. Free my hands, I do implore. How dare you hold me here against my will? You hurt . . . you trouble me!"

Her plaintive voice, in which pride, anger, and acute distress trembled, broke a little and he was somewhat moved. Releasing her hands he begged her to stay with him a few moments longer and promised to offend no more. She sat down again, chafing and yearning to be free.

"I would give all I possess in the world to make you like me," he declared, "to see your eyes meet mine kindly and without distrust. What can I do to convince you that I am your very humble, very devoted lover?"

"Lover!" She turned visibly pale before his eyes. Emotional natures play these tricks. Their blood ebbs and flows in sudden and unexpected currents. From the pinkest rose she became on an instant the pearliest lily.

"Yes, you darling! your lover—your own true lover! Will you try to realize this and let me hope? I know at present you cannot give me your unawakened heart; but some day, when your girlish sleep is past,

and you can love with a woman's passion—then—then give it to me, come to me, my beautiful darling Millicent. What a perfect name for one who is so honey sweet, the quintessence of a thousand flowers!"

She could only gaze at him with parted lips, from which the scarlet hue had flown.

"Some day you will be mine, my very own," he whispered, bending forward till his mouth was near her white cheek and his eyes were hungry flames scorching her soul. She shrank.

"Oh never, never!" she exclaimed impetuously, involuntarily. "Do not think it—do not speak of it again, I pray you, sir. Let me be as I am . . . I want no man for my lover. I will not have you. Let me be."

The opposition of a woman's will rouses in every man a primitive desire of subjugation by force; in some men it lets loose a ravening wolf. Ivo Newman, cool, nonchalant, cynical, collected in all the ordinary situations of life, when self-command is a man's best weapon against the world, lost his hold upon the reins now and forgot all his most cherished precepts, the wolf in him at large. Inflamed by Melisent's sensuous and compelling beauty, stung by her rejection of his advances, he was in no mood to withstand opportunity and temptation, to forgo a triumph over trembling and helpless womanhood.

"But I say that I am your lover, and you shall love me in return," he swore, with a short heaving of the breath. "You are very young; you do not know your own mind; you cannot comprehend what love means. I will teach you . . . I will woo you and win you, Millicent, little icicle as you are! There will be no escape from

me . . . do not think it. You belong to me. Do not struggle against your destiny, darling; you will only hurt yourself. Can't you feel my power—my love drawing you? I know you can. Your heart trembles." He took one hand gently and stroked it, his burning eyes still upon her face, his voice rising and falling in a cadence of sweet and moving tenderness that gave her an almost physical pain. "Dear little heart that does not yet know itself, give yourself to me—now—Millicent—your heart to mine!"

He drew her slowly, imperceptibly towards him, and his eyes held hers fascinated. She swayed a little forward of her own accord, with an agonized look of compelled passion, till her lips were nearly upon his.

And then she stiffened, threw back her head and sprang to her feet, with a sudden revulsion and effort of will.

"Swithun!" she called, in a strange hoarse cry of fear.

The door opened immediately and the splendid footman stood there in his plush and paint. It was obvious he had been waiting outside. Not listening; the door was too thick for that; but waiting—and for what? Did he expect that call?"

"I want you, Swithun," she spoke breathlessly: "I want you." He strode towards her quickly, his artificially blackened eyebrows set in a straight line and a look upon his face so fierce and menacing that it brought Melisent to her senses. "I want you," she continued more calmly, "to put out all the lights and see that the fires are quite extinguished before you retire for the night. These cups should be taken away. My father—where is he?"

"Mr. de Paganel has gone home with my Lady

Manwood, madam. He told me to tell you that he should not be gone long, as my Lady is sending him back in her carriage. But he begged you not to sit up for him, if you were minded to retire."

(It were perhaps unnecessary to say that this message was pure invention !)

"I would indeed fain retire, Swithun, for I feel weary," said Melisent gratefully; and turning to Newman she asked, with forced humility: "Have I your permission, sir ?"

Newman was rolling a cigarette with an insolent smile on his lips.

"Would you leave me to the ghostly loneliness of this haunted place ?" he said. "Cruel ! Will you not grant the favour of your company at least until Mr. de Paganel returns ?"

Melisent was irresolute, poised between her natural instinct of hospitality and an equally instinctive fear of her guest. Swithun came to the rescue with another inspiration.

"Verily wishes to speak to you before she goes to bed, madam, if you can spare her a few minutes," he said gravely.

"Poor Verily ! Is she not abed yet ? And she was up before five this morning," cried Melisent, catching gratefully at the excuse.

"She says she cannot retire without seeing you, madam."

"Then I must once more beg you to excuse my absence," said Melisent to Newman. "I wish you a very good-night, sir." She dropped an elaborate curtsy. Newman put out his hand; she had to lay hers in it and he held it for several seconds.

"Your servants seem to have you well under com-

mand, fair lady," he said, laughing unpleasantly. "Have you a vacancy for one? I would willingly take a post in your services, and you should fix my wages yourself." He glanced meaningly at Swithun, whose jaws were locked closely together and whose face bore no more expression than a mask. "But," continued Newman, "of course I should not dream of trying to retain you against your will. I would prefer to suffer the deprivation of your company. Good-night, sleep well and dream of"—he stooped and kissed her hand—"of me," he whispered, close to her ear.

Swithun had turned away, but he was acutely conscious of what took place and caught the whispered word. His face said nothing as he walked to the door and held it open for Melisent, who passed through with a scarlet flame in her face.

When they were gone, Ivo Newman swore a long and elaborate oath in a strange tongue. Then he lighted his cigarette and flung himself on the couch by the dying wood fire.

"What a consummate fool I am to play this silly game, which is so little worth the candle!" he reflected. "I believe it is nothing but her disdain that fires me—a chit like that, with no style, no tricks, no knowledge of the world. She did not attract me in the least till she made me see that my presence was objectionable. But from the first she has shrunk from me. I wonder why. No woman ever did before. I suppose that is the reason I'm determined to have her, being a gambler born, a lover of the chase. Sport for sport's sake; risk for risk's sake. The game for the love of it, not for the stakes; those have always been my sentiments. I play to win, but not for the prize. And I mean to

win. I have the trump in my hand. I am *going* to win."

He smoked a few minutes without conscious thought; then he went on:

"She will think of me all night. Next time I shall take the kiss and she will think of me still more. She is as impressionable as wax. Silly little fool! Does she fancy she can do as she likes with Ivo Newman? What was that Gardener doing outside the door? Listening through the keyhole, I suppose—skulking, spying, ill-conditioned brute! Who is he? I wonder if Christopher Manwood put him here to watch me. But how should he know? However, it is of no consequence, anyhow. It would take a clever detective to catch me out. I am here on business, pure business, and yet—as a matter of fact, I've almost lost sight of it lately, hunting this new quarry. But she's worth it. I'm not ashamed of losing my head over her. I should like to show her in London, properly dressed. What a sensation she would make!" He flung the end of his cigarette into the ashes, and sat up.

"Gosh! what has come over me?" he exclaimed, half aloud. "Here I am sentimentalizing like a brain-sick boy, or an Elizabethan poet. What a dam fool I am! I believe the air of this place is getting into my blood, and I shall find myself, before long, writing love sonnets to the cold and beauteous Fair in a fine phrenzy! If I do, it will not be on the lines of:—

> "'What care I how fair she be,
> If she be not fair to me?'"

"A woman is more stimulating when she's coy than when she's kind. This girl would, I imagine, be very tame and clinging to the man of her choice. And I

can't stand 'em tame and clinging. So, little vixen, show your teeth and spit fire as much as you please; I'll only love you the more."

He was musing thus when his host returned. And thereupon they had a long and serious talk. But not of Melisent. Ivo knew better than to talk to Mr. de Paganel of any subject save one—Godwin de Paganel's self!

CHAPTER XXVI

" I live, and yet methinks I do not breathe ;
I thirst and drink, I drink and thirst again ;
I sleep and yet do dream I am awake ;
I hope for that I have ; I have and want :
I sing and sigh ; I love and hate at once.
O tell me, restless soul, what uncouth jar
Doth cause in store such want, in peace such war ?"

John Wilbye, 1607.

WHEN they were in the passage, Swithun asked Melisent abruptly : " Why did you call me ?"

The question, and the tone in which it was put, startled Melisent. She stammered :

" I . . . oh, I know not, Swithun. 'Twas without thought, and I did not expect you to come to my call. Were you at the door ?"

" I was, for I awaited your summons—madam. If you had not called me I should have come in, on the pretext of a message from your father."

" But why . . . why ? Did you think——" She stopped.

" I thought you would want me," said Swithun. " I was prepared to throw your guest out of the window, if necessary."

Her eyes fell. She did not speak. They had reached the kitchen, where a dim light was burning. Swithun set down the cups he was carrying. The room was empty.

" Where is Verily ?" Melisent demanded.

" I presume she has gone to bed."

"But you told me . . . "

"Both my messages were fictitious," returned Swithun coolly. "I thought you desired to be free from Mr. Newman's society."

There fell a short silence between them. Then she almost whispered: "Swithun . . . he cannot harm me."

No answer.

"Say that he cannot harm me," she reiterated, and her voice was full of vague alarm. "What is it you fear in him, Swithun?"

"What do you fear yourself?"

"Alas! I know not."

"It is always the unknown that we fear most," quoth Swithun. "Trust your own instinct and give him a wide berth."

"A . . . wide . . . berth——" she echoed, perplexed.

"Give him no chances," he explained. "Do not see him alone again, as to-night. I cannot always be eavesdropping. Avoid him."

"Indeed, that have I always done. Do you mean that he is really wicked . . . like Comus?" she asked, with wide eyes.

"It may be well for you to think so," he answered, smiling somewhat grimly.

At his words Melisent recalled what had passed in the Library and her cheeks began once more to burn. The impulse to tell Swithun everything tempted her, but she resisted it. Nevertheless, her next words told him as much as if she had plainly confessed all.

"Can love mean ill—work ill?" she said tremulously. "And do men always falsely swear it?"

"Some men are false in all they swear; false to themselves and everyone who trusts them," he answered, with more vehemence than he intended. For the

thought that Newman had dared to speak of love to her roused in him a fierce indignation. That he was a scoundrel Swithun surmised; that he was ill-bred and coarse-fibred Swithun knew.

"And how can we ever tell the true from the false?" said Melisent dolefully. "You, who have lived in the greater world, may be able, but how should I—a maid who hath never gone beyond these gates?"

She stood leaning against the great dresser, interrogating him with such piteous eyes that his own could not meet them. To him it seemed, at this moment, as if her lovely face and body had become suddenly transparent, making visible the naked soul, so dazzlingly white, so divinely pure, that it were sacrilege to look upon it. And he was filled with the spirit of true worship, the worship of a man who can idealize, and realize his ideals; who has learnt that the most dangerous illusions are those of the flesh and puts his faith in things unseen, as the only things that really matter.

"I cannot tell you," he said at last, with lowered eyes, "how to know the true from the false by any rule of thumb. Such knowledge is intuitive; we can only feel it. Do *you* not know? Does nothing within tell you that this man is not worthy of your confidence?"

"But I may be wrong," she murmured. "My feelings may mislead me."

"Impossible," said Swithun. "Your own instincts could not mislead you. Trust in them, in yourself. I was wrong to warn—to frighten you. There was no need to warn while you are—what you are, 'armed with a hidden strength.' You spoke of Comus just now, do you remember the Brother's words—'a thousand liveried angels lackey her'? So with you."

Melisent sighed. "Ah, once I believed in those

angels. I used to think I heard the wings of my own good angel near my bed," she said sadly. "But now . . . I know not . . . all seems changed. Methinks the evil angel hovers near sometimes. You cannot understand, Swithun, how a maid is swayed, one way and the other, by a warfare of different feelings. One moment I distrust; the next I pity and reproach myself for having distrusted. I am drawn hither and thither, against my will, against my nature. What doth it all mean? That good and evil fight for the possession of my soul, or that I am simply as a fallen leaf blown by the wind? But how shouldst thou comprehend this, being a man?"

"I comprehend it well because I am a man," he said. "The life of man is a battle-field, from first to last, and few come out of it victors. We can protect others better than ourselves. This is why it is good for a man and woman to marry, I think, that each may protect and watch over the other."

He did not look at her as he spoke. But when he had spoken his eyes were drawn to hers and once again they became locked in a mutual gaze of yearning and deep sympathy. Melisent was first to break free and turn away. She was moved beyond speech and a strange agony overcame her. Who was this man that he held such power over her spirit, in whose presence she felt so curiously soothed, so sheltered and comforted? The Gardener, one who had come from nobody knew where, her servant and Verily's equal! Pride of birth was the heritage of many generations in Melisent, and the pangs she suffered from a knowledge of the gulf that yawned between her and Swithun may be readily conceived by anyone who has known that heritage. Her consciousness that the difference in

their degrees always diminished to vanishing-point when face to face brought small comfort. She felt that she ought to be his superior and yet was not. The sense of this was disconcerting and chafed her, though she could not wish it otherwise. And now his speech about marriage gave her a shock, perhaps accentuated by the sight of his powdered wig and plush livery. Surely a servant should not speak of marriage in the presence of his lady! But, try as she would, she could not say a haughty or repressive word to him. She spoke not at all until she had lighted her candle and gone to the door, which Swithun held open for her. Then, without raising her eyelashes, she said gently: "Good-night, Swithun. I . . . I will think over all you have said and be on my guard. Good-night."

Truly, she was, as she said, swayed hither and thither by conflicting forces. For even at that instant, feeling an acute consciousness of their relative positions and strongly impressed by a sense of the duty she owed to herself to keep this servant in his proper place, she could not resist offering him her hand. It seemed to extend itself without her volition. But he did not take it. She flushed again in hurt surprise.

"Forgive me," he said, "but I do not wish to touch your hand until . . . I have proved myself worthy of that honour. Then, and then only, I will ask you for it. Good-night, madam."

His manner was superb. It was a new Swithun who spoke in that firm proud voice, without subservience as without accent. Involuntarily Melisent dropped a curtsy as she went out.

"Oh, he must indeed be the Prince disguised!" she said to herself, as she mounted the staircase. "No common man could speak so, look so. Is it possible

that Verily's first foolish whim about him be right? But that would make him an impostor. What must I think? He is, for sure, no gardener, no serving-man. Why, then, is he here . . . whence comes he, and—what doth he mean?"

These were the questions she asked herself every day. But to-night they pressed more closely. She went to bed weary and perplexed, bewildered with the day's events.

CHAPTER XXVII

"The Bulls, our Furnace,
Still breathing fire : our Argent-Vive, the Dragon,
The Dragon's Teeth, Mercury sublimate. . . .
And they are gathered into Jason's Helm,
The Alembic, and then sowed in Mars his field.
And then sublimed so often till they're fix'd
With this, the Hesperian Garden, Cadmus' Story,
Jove's Shower, the Boon of Midas . . . thousands more
All abstract riddles of our Stone. . . .
. . . Nature doth first beget the imperfect, then
Proceeds she to the perfect."

Ben Jonson.

"By the Dragon Mercurie and non other
He understood, and Brimstone by his brother,
That out of Sol and Luna were ydrawe."

Chaucer.

SWITHUN drowsed by the dying embers of the kitchen fire, half dreaming, half thinking, till faint sounds told him that Mr. de Paganel and his guest were going to bed. Then he roused himself, lighted his candle and went to his stable-room, to divest himself of his gorgeous attire. By the time he had clothed himself in vastly different garments the lights above were out and the old house lay sleeping mid its silent ghosts and little scurrying rats and mice.

It was densely dark save where a silver lance of moonshine broke through a dusty window here and there, and Swithun felt, as he had never felt before, somewhat oppressed by its blackness, its stillness, and the mystery wrapt within its thick walls. Eerie

rustlings and whisperings seemed to follow him along the stone corridors, and his flickering tallow dip served only to emphasize the gloom.

Although bodily weary his brain was very wide-awake. For the work he had before him was exciting, and not without an element of risk. After relighting the Library lamp and putting out his candle, he went to the ebony cabinet and raised the slanting lid. Taking out one of the drawers he pushed aside a sliding panel and felt for a concealed spring. Another drawer sprang out, whose contents he rifled. They were the missing documents, the lost links of the chain. It had taken him considerable time and patience to discover them ; now they lay here under his eyes, old crinkly and crackly sheets of parchment covered with crabbed characters. He spread them all out on the table before him, took a notebook, and another small book from his pocket, supplied himself with one or two works of Hermetic lore from the bookshelves of Ansculf de Paganel, and applied himself to his nightly labour.

"On the surface, what an abominable course is mine!" he said to himself: "worming myself into a man's house for the purpose of picking his private drawers and making myself master of his secrets! Atrocious! I sometimes wonder if anything can excuse it. But there was no other way, and the absolute consciousness that de Paganel himself will accept my confession, and thank me, when all is known, makes the distasteful task possible. And if I am mistaken, if all my investigations end in smoke, then no one will be any the worse. Kit Swithun will depart in peace and the documents will again lie concealed in their secret drawer to be rediscovered some day by some other curious fool.

"But if I am not mistaken, and the old man did not deceive himself," he continued to reflect, "what a discovery to lay before the world—what a nine days' wonder! And everything points to success; my own discoveries chime exactly to the tune of Ansculf's Secret; and my first find almost clinches it. If I could only get the clue to the real hiding-place, which seems to elude me! It must be somewhere."

He turned to the crabbed MSS. before him and set to his work of deciphering.

It appeared an impossible task. The jumble of queer characters that lay there in Elizabethan handwriting, with its queer tails and flourishes, its occasional Anglo-Saxon letters, faded and discoloured by mildew, was hard enough to read; none but an expert could have done it; but this was not all. The document was written in a cipher and presented a very nightmare of strange words. It was headed "Mwe Leyaem," which certainly bore no resemblance to any word in a known tongue. Swithun read them, however, and had read more than half the MS. "Mwe Leyaem" stood for "The Secret," and the Secret lay under his hand, not yet quite disclosed.

"To think I should be the first," he mused, as he began to transcribe the letters mechanically in the pages of his notebook, "and that the great Secret should have been staring everyone in the face for over three centuries unheeded! 'Ye Rime wiche compasseth Time'—there it spoke, on the sundial, to every passer-by; yet nobody heard its voice, nobody saw in it the key of the mystery.

"'Fayre howres flie,
Ye al must die.'"—

And I am the first to discover the twenty-six letters of the alphabet in that trite reminder of mortality! How did I discover it? What made it jump to my mind's eye? I had read it a dozen times before it conveyed its message to my brain. And assuredly my thoughts were far from the cryptogram at that moment, when *she* stood there in the moonlight, dazzling my sight. How account for such things?"

His labours did not end with the deciphering of the cryptogram; indeed this was only the beginning of his difficulty, and easily mastered when the key was found. But when each word had been interpreted it had again to undergo a process of translation, for the document was couched in that extraordinary jargon which Alchemy had adopted to guard its dangerous and forbidden learning, a language of such wild and gross symbolism that it seemed like metaphor run mad! Someone has called it "a raving chaos of unintelligible extravagance," and it has been the scorn of writers from Chaucer onwards.

Nevertheless behind that 'raving chaos' (from which Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marlowe and many others drew largely in their scenes of magic and mystery) there dwelt, as Swithun well knew, a spirit of true research, a longing and striving after truth, even germs of scientific facts as yet undiscovered. The ancient philosophy of the East found its way to the West after many centuries, and those first sciences of Arabia and Egypt—Magic, Alchemy, Astrology—paved the way for future development in psychic lore, chemistry, and astronomy. Over the gulf of years lie many bridges upon which ancient and modern thought may meet, and scientists of to-day are ready to acknowledge a debt of gratitude where, fifty years ago, they

showed nothing but scorn for these first gropings of the human intellect after things arcane and occult, inextricably bound up with the physical facts of the universe.

But what stuff this jargon of Alchemy was to the uninitiated! Swithun could not help smiling as he set down the translated words:—'Flying Eagle' (mercury), 'Green Lion' (matter entering into the composition of mercury), 'King' (perfect sulphur), with 'Pandora's Tub,' 'Medea's Charms,' 'Pythagoras' Thigh,' 'Jason's Helm,' 'Mar's Field,' 'Hesperian Garden,' 'Jove's Shower,' 'Flower of Wisdom,' 'Flower of the Lily,' 'Dragon's Teeth,' etc., which he again translated into their chemical and common-sense meanings.

"No wonder old Ben Jonson made a laughing-stock of it for all time in *The Alchymist*," he thought, "since he doubtless knew nothing whatever of the esoteric meaning and could judge only from the fudge quoted by the various charlatans who practised the art for swindling purposes. He must have studied the outside of it considerably, however, or he could not have put together that wonderful hotch-potch of Hermetic symbols and recipes.

"'Hair o' the head, burnt clouts, chalk, merds and clay,
Powder of bones, scalings of iron, glass.
And worlds of other strange ingredients,
Would burst a man to name.'

It reminds one of nothing so much as a Witches' Sabbath or Hecate, in *Macbeth*:

"'Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,
Witches' mummy, maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark;
Root of hemlock digged i' the dark.'

Lovely stews these! No wonder Faust spoke of the 'nauseous puddle of that pot.' Incredible to us now that the foremost intellects of their time should have condescended to hide their science and their art under such grotesque imagery. But I suppose it was strictly necessary to conceal their methods completely, to wrap up their knowledge, both occult and practical, in a way no mortal man could unravel without the clue.

"And this quaint nonsense was really the parent of our knowledge to-day; the only science attempted, the first stumbling after truth, and not devoid of it, despite a thousand errors. At least we may learn one thing from those old Alchemists,—their earnest reverence of, and deep wonder at, the beauty and mystery of the universe. Modern man is too apt to take everything for granted and wonder at nothing; while religion and science wander miles apart. The ancient scientists were passionately bent on holiness, and believed it to be the only road towards real enlightenment."

He worked on laboriously for a short time, methodically digging out the meaning, word by word, but coming to nothing that gave him the clue he sought for. And so his thoughts wandered again, for the work was almost mechanical.

"Curious how they mixed up orthodox faith with White Magic and Astral Lore! Ansculf believed, apparently, in the Nenuphar, the Flos, and all the other spirits of earth, air, fire and water, the Elementals and Daemons, Incubi and Succubi, said to be the Familiars of witches and warlocks. For I find the sign of the Pentagram, that charm against evil spirits, inscribed in every book and document of his. Strange old days, when superstition and error clasped hands

with a profound yearning for truth and knowledge. And yet—how dare we call the beliefs of any age superstitious? Emerson explained magic, and all that is ascribed to it, as 'a deep presentiment of the powers of science.' We lose sight of the original meaning of magic:—wisdom; and perhaps they showed more wisdom than we do in recognizing, as active influences upon matter, the unseen forces surrounding them. At least we are coming to think, some of us, that their ideas of astral and elementary gold, of latent invisible fire, were not so wildly chimerical as sceptics have declared. After all, what is this new element we have discovered, this power by which we can dissolve what has hitherto been known as indissoluble, cure diseases, pierce solid bodies? We are surrounded by mystery, and are learning daily to distrust the evidence of our senses. Age of wireless telegraphy, X rays and radium—can you laugh at magic and mysticism, or have you much to learn from the past? I should not dare to call myself a man of science if I left any door of my mind barred against the entrance of a possible truth from any quarter. I shall seek till I die!"

His eyes, tired as they were with lack of sleep, were fastened, wide open, upon the bookshelf opposite. His hand had ceased to write.

"After all, we know so little," he reflected, "so little, and least of all about ourselves!"

Some words he had read lately, words of the Elizabethan Sir John Davies, were in his mind. They seemed strangely applicable.

> "We that acquaint ourselves with every Zone
> And pass both Tropics and behold both Poles,
> When we come Home are to ourselves unknown,
> And unacquainted still with our own soules."

The discovery Swithun had made recently was a startling one indeed, more startling than any in his scientific experience. For it shocks a man to find that he has never known himself at all, and, at thirty years of age, to come face to face with his soul for the first time! With the result of his schemes and labours lying before him, the battle almost won, the magic key he had sought so close to his hand, his thoughts wandered to that other mystery confounding him, in the depths of his own hitherto unexplored nature.

"No," he murmured, "up to this moment I had positively no acquaintance with the occupier of this 'machine,' as Hamlet calls it; no knowledge at all of the personality 'in this clay carcase crippled.' And I thought I had. I thought I knew it for a calm, cool, reasoning and highly developed personality, beyond the reach of emotional jars. And to think I have lived with myself all these years without knowing myself a mere savage!"

He laughed a little, but humbly. A man does not feel elated at finding himself to be a savage.

"Murder," he continued to himself, "is the last crime in the world I should ever have deemed myself capable of committing, and yet it would have given me acute pleasure to wring that blackguard's neck to-night. Unbelievable! That homicidal mania should develop suddenly in a tame civilized man at the sight of two hands touching! And I do not even know he is a blackguard. The surmise may be fathered by jealousy, which I have always regarded as the most absurd, childish, barbarous and vile of human weaknesses. Othello has ever appeared to me in the light of a contemptible, irrational ass! And now—oh, Melisent!"

The phantom he had been subconsciously warding off ever since he had come into the Library rose up before him now in all its masterful witchery : the vision of a lovely face and form, red lips smiling tenderly, starry eyes shedding delicious radiance in the dim place. All through his work, in this dusty tomb of past and forgotten thought, the man of science had been striving against that other man, of passion and sentiment, to throw off the spell that lay upon him.

> " Her body sweet and the face of her,
> Take my heart as in a snare,
> Loyal love is but her share
> That is so sweet."

Something in this wise his thoughts ran, and he knew himself now, saw plainly what thing had happened to him. Like an honest and valiant man he stood up to himself and faced the fact of his reason's overthrow. The moments flew by ; he rested with his chin on his hand gazing at the image his mind had evoked, and the cabbalistic writing lay below unheeded.

" I am love-shaked," he said at last, using Orlando's word, with a queer sense of living back in Elizabeth's day, when men had loved so ardently and without shame. He rose and stretched himself upwards, flung back his head.

" Oh, Melisent—Melisent ! Sweetest, loveliest !" he murmured ; " what have you done to me, to make me yours till I die ? What have you done to me ?"

He paced the room once or twice and then sat down by the table, pressing his tired and aching eyeballs with his two hands, to shut out the vision of her and continue his work.

Then a strange thing happened.

Thinking of it afterwards, he remembered that he

had frequently been able to make his mind a blank by pressing his eyes firmly, and in that condition some part of his brain had arrived at the solution of certain problems which had for some time eluded him. We may believe in this unconscious cerebration, as it is called, without straining our credulity, if we please; but why not adopt another hypothesis and surmise that Swithun fell into one of those hypnotic trances when the individual becomes a medium for some unknown influence outside himself? It will stretch our imagination but a little way, and when the mind is making pictures (as the mind of the reader must do all the time he is reading) what is one picture more or less?

Let us imagine, then, that we see before our eyes the great chamber, with its groined roof and walls of solid books, dim in the light of a single oil-lamp. That we see a man sitting, with bowed head, at a table on which are spread old parchments, and printed volumes. He is silent and motionless, alone in the Library. But, as we watch, there glides noiselessly over the floor a shadowy Figure, clad in the long dark robe of tradition, his face hidden by a cowl. He stands over Swithun, making passes above his head with luminous hands. We see the dreamer shiver as those spirit hands seem lightly to touch his hair; and all the while we may say to ourselves, if we will, that it is only a dream, that the dead do not return.

But dream, or trance, or unconscious cerebration—whatever it was—Swithun awoke suddenly with a vivid sense of knowledge gained, of work completed. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. Some lines from *The Alchymist* were running in his head: "The chamber where the Bull snorteth, still breathing fire," and they

were followed by others as distinct, but from no known source :—" Beneath the Dragon's belly."

" Who said that ?" he asked aloud, and his voice sounded ghostly and hollow in the gloomy place.

He turned to the cryptogram on the table. It had come to have, quite suddenly, a familiar appearance, and he found he could read it easily without the aid of his key. He wrote down the translation rapidly to the end of the page, and there he found the words that were already in his mind :

" It shall be found in the chamber where the bull snorteth, up the narrow way beneath the Dragon's belly."

" At last !" he cried.

His words echoed round the room and he listened anxiously for any sound that might respond to them from roused members of the household ; but none came. His hands shook with the excitement that overpowered him, as he began to put back the documents in their secret drawer and gather up his own.

" Can I have slept and dreamt it, in those few minutes," he thought, looking at his watch ; " and why did I not think of the Dragon before ? There must be another secret stairway probably at the back of the furnace. And I have been taking the word ' Dragon ' in its Hermetic sense, all the while, as a symbol of Mercury, instead of concretely as the heraldic stone beast outside. But I see all now clearly. It has been difficult to unravel, but by Hermes Trismegistus ! I've unravelled it at last ! I have my clue to the Secret."

A little brown mouse, one of the fortunate who had managed to escape Pearl and the many traps set about the Library, glided across the table and fixed its beady eyes on Swithun's face as he sat thinking. He put

out his hand to touch it gently. A faint squeak and it was gone.

"Were you, I wonder, Ansculf's Familiar, or only a commonplace descendant of the mice who kept him company centuries ago?" he mused. "Yes—I've found the clue, but what shall I find 'beneath the Dragon's belly'? I ought to know soon what is the verdict upon the small specimen I found the other night. It was impossible to test it properly here, but I have no doubt as to its quality. Still, it might, of course, be a solitary fragment, and the rest a failure. It would seem unlikely that Ansculf succeeded wholly where Roger Bacon and so many famous men failed. But *did* they fail? Or did they find it the only safe policy to conceal success? Who knows? And now for my descent into Avernus!"

He went towards the bookshelves by the deep embrasure of the window on the west side, where the works of Alchemy were stored, and began to take them out, piling them on the floor. When there was a large open space, he inserted his hand and groped behind the shelves. Presently the whole framework moved slowly and disclosed a yawning aperture large enough to admit a man. It looked very black and uninviting, but Swithun was none the less about to step into it when something arrested him. He started back with an exclamation of annoyance.

His eye had caught the grey light of dawn issuing through a chink in the shutter, while his ears caught a raptured chorus of awakening birds outside. The shutters were very roughly made and had half an inch of open space here and there between the boards. He could look through and see the budding trees quite plainly in the primrose light of the new-born day.

"Too late!—I am a fool," he muttered, closing the secret door and beginning to fill in the shelves again with their musty occupants. "I have wasted too much time to-night . . . oh, Melisent!"

There was a jubilant peal of song from the thrushes in the garden hailing the promise of day. Swithun gathered up his books and papers hastily, cast an eye round the room to see that he had left no trace of his presence there, put out the lamp, already fluttering in its dance of death, and went out softly.

"To-morrow," he reflected, "I shall know *all*."

CHAPTER XXVIII

"He cometh unto you with a tale that holdeth children from play, and old men from chimney corners."

Sir Philip Sidney.

"Hence, horrible shadow!
Unreal mockery, hence! . . .
Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder?"

Macbeth.

SWITHUN was at work in a tangled corner of the garden, freeing a broken statue of Hermes from a tangled mass of bramble and bryony that had matted round it. There was little to be seen of the god save his winged cap. The right arm, bearing the caduceus, had gone, leaving only a mutilated stump of elbow, but the rest of the figure was there. Swithun enjoyed setting these old statues free from their bonds, and to-day being somewhat tired after a sleepless night, he found the work less arduous than digging or planting.

There had been rain in the night, and the foliage still glistened in the sunlight that filtered through the budding trees, full of enraptured nest-builders.

He was engrossed in his own thoughts, as well as the work of his hands, when he heard a voice that sent all meditations packing and raised a tumult in his blood.

"Swithun!" cried Melisent breathlessly. "Oh, Swithun, the Stranger is taking my father away—to London city."

Both she and Verily still spoke of Ivo Newman as 'The Stranger.' It seemed as if he would never be anything else to them.

Swithun gave vent to a startled exclamation. "When do they go?" he asked.

"To-morrow morn, about noon." There was the sound of tears in her voice, as she continued: "I have felt so long that something was about to befall us—some ill. My father has been so changed since our guest came; so unlike himself. He hath talked more, eaten more, drunken more, and there hath been a strange light in his eyes. The old peace that was there hath fled. He is restless now, and cannot stay long in one place, whereas of yore he would sit in the Library for whole days without stirring. Swithun, why is it? And do they go together to London city?"

"How should I know?" said Swithun slowly. "The only reason that occurs to me is that Mr. Newman has fired your father's ambition to see something of the world, of the great city which is England's brain and main artery. Has he given no reason to you?"

"He hath told me he will do so later, when there will be something to tell me, something that will make me very proud. And his eyes shone as he spake, like those of a child about to possess some wished-for toy. What can it mean?"

"I know!" exclaimed Swithun, with sudden inspiration. "His book! It is the publication of his book he goes to accomplish."

"His book!" the girl faltered. "Oh, but he hath written no book, Swithun, only fragments—quite small fragments. And how do books get published? Do they not cost money?"

"Perhaps Mr. Newman knows some publisher who

will buy your father's book," Swithun suggested, wishing to comfort and reassure her. But he held no such belief, and his mind was busy with her problem. What had Ivo Newman to gain by wheedling Godwin de Paganel away from the home in which he had buried himself so long? There was an unpleasant flavour of mystery and double-dealing in this action.

At this moment Verily arrived on the scene, bringing the hunk of bread and red cheese she was pleased to call Swithun's 'eleven o'clock.' It gave her the excuse of a chat with him.

She joined in the conversation at once, and had, as usual, her own opinion, full-grown and all armed like Minerva from the head of Jove, on the Master's aberration; for it seemed an aberration to these two simple women.

"Plain as pie!" she declared emphatically. "He goes to marry. Did I not see it in the Lady's eyes when she was here t'other night? And in his too, forsooth. They were playing Cupids all supper-time. And if there be not somewhat in it, why did I stumble upstairs last night, when I was going to bed? Tell me that."

"I really can't say, Verily," responded Swithun gravely, as the question was directed at him.

"But I can. 'Twas because of a wedding. Everybody knows it."

"Then perhaps it meant your own wedding," said Swithun.

Verily shook her head.

"Ah, lad, would I could think so! But my true love is far away. God keep him! And Lady Manwood is a whit too nigh for safety. Mark my words. Our young lady will have a stepmother before the

month is out, and the Stranger—rot his bones!—will be best man."

"Pray—oh, pray do not speak thus, Verily," implored Melisent faintly.

"Your fancy jumps too far, Mrs. Verily," Swithun said, smiling. "It is not likely that the Master, after waiting all these years, would take unto himself a wife without due consideration."

Melisent cast him a grateful glance.

"'Twere madness to think it," she murmured.

"Thou'lt see I am right, Mistress," Verily maintained stoutly: "and, what's more, I know what will happen then. They will give thee no peace until they have wed thee to the Stranger, to have thee outen the way. I see it all—as plain as pie!"

"Your eyes deceive you, Verily," said Swithun, with sudden energy: "I say that your young lady will never wed the Stranger."

"And pray how know ye that, young man?" demanded Verily.

"Never mind how, ma'am. I do know it; let that content you. The sky will fall ere such an event takes place." His eyes met Melisent's boldly as he spoke.

"Swithun is quite right," she said, turning to the house.

Verily lingered behind.

"I bring a message to thee from the Master, Swithun," she said, "which I had a'most forgot, owing to other thoughts. He bids thee go to the Post Office, to catch the noon post out, as he hath important despatches to be delivered."

"Good—so have I," quoth Swithun, without thinking. Verily's stare recalled him to his present estate. "I mean—I, too, have a letter to post," he said.

There were several letters concealed in his room and now he had another in his mind.

"The stars are propitious," he thought, as he went indoors. "I was wondering how on earth I could catch this morning's post." There was no time to lose. He sat down in his stable chamber and wrote quickly the following letter:

"Two gentlemen, one Mr. de Paganel of Paganel Garth, the other calling himself Ivo Newman, address unknown, go to London from Hernspool station tomorrow about noon. I desire to have them watched. Mr. de Paganel is a slight, not very tall but strikingly handsome man of middle age, with remarkably blue eyes. The other is tall and dark, of somewhat Semitic type. Talks with a peculiar accent. I want to know where they stay, who are their companions and what they do."

He signed his name hastily, put the letter in an envelope, addressed and sealed it, with a splash of red wax, pressed clumsily by his thumb. It had to be hurriedly done for he knew that Verily would be watching impatiently for him, with the Master's letters, and wondering at his delay.

He was right. She met him with a frown.

"Lord! what a time thou hast been, Swithun, a-cleaning thyself up!" she cried. "I swear there must be a maiden in the village thou'rt after."

"And why not?" he replied cheerfully, as he strode away.

He never went to the village without calling at the Chough and Crow to drink a mug of beer and collect scraps of gossip, which not only amused him but occasionally afforded useful information. So, when he had posted the letters, registering two of his own, he

went into the tavern. A man was leaning at the bar talking to Mrs. Jolly, the innkeeper's wife, and Swithun recognized him at once as the shepherd, Jabez Maundy, well credited with the longest tongue in the village. He did not turn round as Swithun entered and asked for a pint of ale, but went on talking in confidential tones, while the Gardener from Paganel Garth took his drink to a corner of the old-fashioned settle by the fireplace and lighted his pipe. Maundy's voice, even when lowered, was penetrating, and the listener heard every word he said.

At first his remarks were merely informatory and loosely strung together. It was a well-known fact, he attested, that the Master of Paganel Garth were a-courting Lady Manwood, and that Sir Christopher favoured the match between them because he wanted to get shut of her and live in his own house; being as he had a lady in his eye, a rich young lady at London town he wanted to marry, and bring to the Towers. Here followed a dissertation on the folly of not being master in your own house, and a general analysis of the character of Sir Christopher Manwood, vastly diverting to one of his hearers. Furthermore, he continued, the Stranger who had come from London to stay at Paganel Garth were a-courting the young lady, and there would likely be a double wedding. It was all cut and dried—a bare statement of facts so far, but more delectable fare was to come.

The Dragon at Paganel Garth, Maundy declared, had been heard by several persons a-moaning and a-groaning, while the uneasy ghost of old Sir Ansculf had begun to walk again. He had been seen crossing the Court-yard at midnight, in his hooded garb, with a strange light shining about him.

"I tell ye, missus," continued the shepherd, in a hushed, but perfectly audible, voice, "there's summat going to happen up there, as I'm a living man. Ghostes don't walk for nothing. But he do walk now, and 'tis no gossip I be telling of ye neither. Look 'ere, missus, you'll take my word as a Christian man—*I seed it wi' my very own eyes!*"

"Lawks, Maundy! You don't say," exclaimed Mrs. Jolly, blenching slightly. "You do make my blood run cold."

"It be the truth as I'm a living man, missus. I know you think as how I may have had a drop too much and fancied I seed it; but 'twere not so. I worn't alone neither. Triper were wi' me. We were a-sitting up with a sick yow, long past midnight, in the field over beyond Paganel Garth, that un as were once the Park, and we both seed it plain."

"And what was it like?" she asked.

"First of all we seed a light come in the Library, long arter the house were all shut up and the folks i' bed. A sorter greenish light from the big winder, through the chinks o' the shutters."

"You don't say."

"'Tis a fact. But that were not all. Triper and me we got so curious we couldn't stick i' the hut no longer, so we went acrost the field, and clumb over the stone wall as bounds the Garth, and crep' up to the terrace. It were a-trespassing, we knew, but we were that curious——"

"Go on—let's hear what you saw," said Mrs. Jolly, growing impatient.

"Well, we crep' up and along the side to the window where the light was, and"—his voice sank still lower—"there we heard—*sounds!*"

"What sounds?"

"Unked sounds, missus, I can tell ye; nothing earthly I'll be sworn. And we seed something a-moving past the chinks o' light. 'Twere no human mortal man we seed, neither."

"What did it look like," asked the buxom wife breathlessly.

"I couldn't tell ye for the life o' me. It were all upright and down-straight, so to speak, wi' no face like —most horrid to think on."

Mrs. Jolly shuddered.

"That be not the worst," said Maundy, taking a long pull at his mug, and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Not the worst by a long chalk, missus." He spoke with great emphasis and gusto.

"Let's hear the worst, then," she said again impatiently.

"I'm a-telling of yer, ain't I?" He grew even more solemn and owlish. "We heared sommat as made we both shiver and shake in we're shoes. For it were a sound coming from the bowels o' the earth below, right underneath the house—as it might be in the 'fernal regions."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Mrs. Jolly, impressed.

"At first it sounded like somebody going down steps, very careful like. Then there were a rumbling sort o' noise. And just then *the light vanquished.*"

He uttered the last words in a loud blood-curdling whisper.

"What could it ha' been?" cried the worthy ale-wife, now thoroughly roused.

"I know," said Maundy, leaning over the bar to her and speaking in a hoarse whisper. "It *were devils.* All the world knows as Sir Ansculf were a devil-wor-

shipper and a warlock. I believe that there cellar's full of 'em," he concluded in a triumphant tone.

"Full of—what?" she asked faintly.

"Devils! Oh, it's all very well to laugh, missus. I know as folks don't believe in devils nowadays, though Parson he do preach about 'em often enough. I bain't suppositious myself—nobody ever see me frit, and I'm bin out all hours o' the night, and nigh the graveyard too, loads o' times wi'out seeing anything. I'm never put no faith in ghostes and witches, like some I knows on. But seeing is believing, and if I didn't see that there ghost my name ain't Jabez Maundy! And Jim Triper, he seed it too. You ask him if I've told ye lies, missus. He'll cobberate all I'm said. Mark my words—there's something going to happen up at Paganel Garth, and that afore long."

Swithun rose and paid for his drink.

"That's an unked tale ye've just told, master," he said to the shepherd, in his broadest accents. "But it's true enough. I'm seen as much since I bin working up there. But if you'll take my advice you won't say too much about it, nor go nigh the place again. Them ghostes and devils, if they be so, don't like being watched. You might come to some harm if they ketched you at it."

Thereupon he nodded to the hostess and slouched out in the most natural rustic fashion.

"I shouldn't wonder if there's summat in what he said," observed the shepherd, and Mrs. Jolly echoed—"I shouldn't wonder."

* * * * *

As he walked back to Paganel Garth Swithun pondered over what he had heard.

"It is fortunate," he reflected, "that this business

will soon be at an end, or we should have the whole village on the prowl, watching for the Ghost. The modern rustic, however ignorant, is not like the ancient one. Whatever vague fears and lingering superstitions haunt his mind, his curiosity overcomes them and he burns to investigate, to penetrate a mystery. Ansculf would have had no spies daring or inquisitive enough to watch his nocturnal operations. The yokels of his day took everything supernatural for granted, and firmly believed in devils. I wonder if Maundy really does. It was quite refreshing to hear him say so. But he won't be satisfied till he finds out what they are doing in the 'bowels of the earth' beneath Paganel Garth, all the same. I doubt if even my warning will daunt him. For he's a product of his century."

"So ye're back, Swithun," said Verily reprovingly as he entered the Court-yard where she was swilling and clacking about in pattens. "It seems ye found her kind, as ye've been so long."

"I'm sorry you've missed me so much, Verily."

She gave a snort. "Missed thee! Not me indeed. Why should I miss any man, save one? and him I ha' been a-missing for many a long day."

"Never mind. He'll come soon now," Swithun assured her, consolingly.

"How d'ye know that?" she demanded sharply, and he remembered that she took everything seriously.

"Because I feel it in my bones," he answered, gravely: "Something tells me he can't be long now."

"God be praised!" she ejaculated.

He silenced his self-reproaches by the reflection that there can be no harm in invoking the phantom of hope, even if it be likely to remain a phantom.

CHAPTER XXIX

" I attempt from Love's sicknesse to flie in vain.
Since I am, myself, my own fever and paine.
No more now, fond harte, with pride should we swell.
Thou can'st not raise forces enough to rebell.
I attempt from Love's sicknesse to flie in vain."

Anon. (*17th Century*).

THE first day after the departure of her father with Ivo Newman, Melisent went about the house and garden as if in a dream, with vacant eyes and abstracted manner. She was going over and over the events of the past week in her mind and blaming herself for her father's absence. Had she not made it almost impossible for the Stranger to remain under the same roof with her, by her persistent coldness to him, and was not this his revenge, after his own peculiarly subtle and perplexing fashion? When he bade her good-bye there had certainly been a derisive, if not positively malicious, smile upon his restless mouth, and the words he had said in her ear haunted her.

" You will be kinder to me next time I come, little Icicle, and not drive me away."

Had she indeed driven him away? Melisent asked herself, and what did he mean by " You will be kinder to me." Was this a form of threat? Her fears were none the less for being vague. She could not define them; she could only dimly surmise he planned to have her in his power.

But after the first day her glowing health and natural

spirits asserted themselves and she became again 'brisk as the April buds in primrose season.' The glorious Spring weather, the rapture of all created things, could not but have its due effect on so impressionable a nature. She worked less and less at her frame and lace-pillow, more and more in the garden with Swithun. They did not talk very much, but there was a persuasive eloquence in their taciturnity. The toil was very sweet to them both, and although one, at least, did not know it, the working side by side at the same task made it the sweeter.

Melisent's fears and anxieties for her father vanished when she was in the garden ; nothing seemed to trouble her there ; it was a true sanctuary against blue devils. Nature has a method all her own of soothing and smoothing. She breeds, sometimes, a gentle melancholy and pensive longing ; but, with her myriad children of the earth—whispering trees, and sky-gazing flowers, crystal drops of dew and rain, happy birds and insects—she has a way of softening out the hard ridges of life, as with a mother's hand.

Melisent learnt to prune and graft under Swithun's tuition. The old gnarled and bent fruit-trees of the orchard bore little fruit, and that so small and flavourless that it was not much better worth eating than the sloes and crabs of the hedgerow. And if the crop to be anticipated from these ancient and worn-out stocks were but small, the crop of hopes raised in Melisent's heart was great enough. Swithun pretended a good deal, made believe that 'the wilderness would blossom as the rose,' that century-old apple-trees would bear luscious fruit after their pruning, while cherry, plum, pear, quince, medlar and fig would yield again their varied sweets. Nature aided his deception by throwing

out a mantle of brown buds, just cracking to show ivory kernels, and one cherry-tree already wore a garb of snow, as if it were a young bride instead of a grizzled and barren crone. But such deception may be forgiven for the effect it had on the young girl. She was rendered so very happy by her expectation of a future harvest of fruit.

How she watched for the first shoots of potato, cabbage, lettuce, peas and beans, turnips and carrots, that Swithun had put in, with what impatience! But this joy cannot be expressed. The heart of the true gardener and nature-lover alone can know it for what it is—a veritable rapture of longing and anticipation.

To add to her zest of life Melisent received, after two days, a very happy and reassuring letter from her father. He was, he said, in excellent health and enjoying the various sights and scenes of the great city. Mr. Newman was the most genial and hospitable of hosts; they were staying at one of the best hostelries, and already he had met some vastly agreeable and entertaining persons, to whom, it appeared, he was not entirely unknown by repute. Altogether the letter breathed such an innocent gaiety that Melisent was touched, and moved with sympathy in her father's pleasure. The realization which had been so recently vouchsafed to her that he was still young enough to enjoy life, and not a mere elderly recluse (as she had once, very naturally supposed), gave point to this sympathy, affording her a better understanding and appreciation of his present condition of mind. She felt happy that he was happy, and tried to forget all her doubts and fears in gratitude to Newman for his goodness to her father.

Her piece of tapestry was almost finished. Verily

and Swithun helped her at the loom in the evenings; and the maid and she together had made six yards of the exquisite lace called 'Mayflie i' the Web.' The money she would receive seemed a small fortune to Melisent. And then to think what she would gain from the garden! What a saving to the domestic exchequer the vegetables would be; what soups Verily would make of them without the aid of expensive butcher's meat!

She sang about the house and garden in these days, the quaint songs that Verily had taught her in her babyhood, or that she had picked out herself on the spinet or lute. The spinet she had long since discarded as impossible, for she could not tune it and it had never been tuned since her mother's day. But the lute she had managed to restring and learn to play a little, instructing herself from a Dowland's *First Boke of Songs and Ayres, with Tableture for the Lute,* which she found among a pile of tattered and mildewed music sheets in a cabinet. Sometimes it would be the short crisp jig of a morris dance that Swithun would hear mingling with the thrush song:

"'Morris dance is a very pretty tune
And I must dance in my new shoon;
My new shoon are quite worn out;
So I must mend them with a clout.'"

Sometimes the tender wail of

"'O Willow, willow, willow!
Sing all a green willow!
Ah me! the green willow
Shall be my gar*land.*'"

But there was one song above all others he loved to hear, one he had heard her singing the first morning he came to the garden. It was set to a minor air so sweet and moving, and with such a 'dying fall' at the close,

that it seemed to pluck at his heart-strings. She was crooning it one day in the rose-garden while she searched for enemies among the breaking buds, and did not note that he stood behind the hedge silently listening. The song had become a favourite with her lately ; she could not say why.

"' I sowed the seeds of Love,
It was all in the Spring,
In April, May and sunny June,
When small birds they do sing.

"' My Garden was planted full
Of Flowers everywhere,
But for myself I could not choose
The Flower I held so dear.' "

There were many verses, and sometimes she would sing one, sometimes another, with pauses in between, and even other snatches of song. To-day she sang :

"' In June came the Rose so red,
And that's the Flower for me,
But when I gathered the Rose so dear,
I gathered but the Willow Tree.

"' Oh, the Willow Tree will twist
And the Willow Tree will twine,
And I would I were in the young man's arms
That ever hath this heart of mine !' "

This was Verily's favourite verse and Melisent had always scoffed at it. But she sang it to-day with a fervour unwonted that gave a tremor to the man behind the hedge. There was a pause after it, as Melisent found a particularly large caterpillar and slaughtered it with a shudder. Then she went on :

"' My Gardener, as he stood by,
He bade me take great care.
For if I gathered the Rose so red
There groweth up a sharp thorn there.

"'I told him I would take no care
Till I did feel the smart,
And still did press the Rose so dear
Till the thorn did pierce my heart.'"

In walking round her rose-trees she came face to face with the hedge and saw Swithun's head over the top. It gave her a start. She had thought him in the vegetable garden.

"What, Swithun! Have you been long there?" she demanded, flushing a rosy red.

"Long enough to hear most of your pretty song," he said. "But why do you sing such a sad one on such a gay morning?"

"Is it sad?" she asked. "I hardly knew what I was singing, forsooth. Could you hear the words? They are rather foolish, methinks, but I love the tune."

"I heard some of the words," said Swithun, "about the twisting and twining of the willow-tree, and the thorn of a rose that pierced your heart. I also learnt that the Gardener was standing by, which happened to be true to life."

She laughed. "The only part that is true to life, Swithun; it is all a silly love-sick thing, fit only for love-sick maids like Verily to sing. I know not why I sang it."

"You think, then, that it is a disgrace to be love-sick," he said, with eyes full upon her. "Let me tell you that is a mistake . . . madam. It is an honour and a glory to a woman, or man, to be able to feel strongly. Anything is better, surely, than to have a heart numb and callous."

His mouth was smiling but his dark eyes grave. She met them with some distress in her own.

"You mean . . . you think . . . as others think . . . that I am cold and heartless——"

"Others!" he ejaculated. "What others?"

"Mr. Newman called me an icicle," she answered, flinging reticence to the winds. "He hath reason to think so doubtless; but you—you, Swithun—what have I done to make you think I have a heart numb and callous?"

The pain in her voice hurt him, but he probed farther.

"If not, why do you laugh at love-sickness?" he said.

"I know not what it is," she murmured, with eyes cast down. "And it seems foolish, to feel so great a smart for nothing."

"Is it for nothing? 'Love is the perfect sum of all delight,' according to one of your Elizabethan writers, and you remember what Orlando said when Jacques told him that his worst fault was being in love: ''Tis a fault I will not change for your best virtue.'"

"Orlando, whomsoever he was, had some sense and was right enow," put in a cracked voice, and there stood Verily with Swithun's plate of bread and cheese. "'Tis a sweet pain, this love, and so the Mistress will find one day. But ne'ertheless 'tis very wearing, when there be no wedding-ring at the end on it."

Melisent laughed, but her eyes suddenly shone with tears and she turned away.

"We have had enough of such talk," she said sharply, "and I will hear no more of it."

In the Dame's Parlour she sat before her loom for some time motionless. At last, clasping her hands to her head, she moaned:

"Oh, do not think . . . be still, be still! You cannot

think and work too; nor can thinking change what is and must be. He is—what he is—and you are Melisent de Paganel. Ah, if only Melisent were Verily and Verily, Melisent!"

She pressed her hands to her throat then, and asked herself: "Where does it hurt? Somewhere I feel a smart, but it seemeth sometimes in my throat, sometimes in my eyes, and again in my heart. It is everywhere by turns. How it aches through me! And what is it? I have no sorrow. My father is well and happy. My garden is filling with flowers. What is it? What is it?"

She rose from her chair and paced the room restlessly. The haunting tune she had sung in the garden rang in her head, to the words—

> "Oh, the Willow Tree will twist
> And the Willow Tree will twine,
> And I would I were in the young man's arms
> That ever hath this heart of mine."

But although she had sung these words lightly and unconsciously enough in the garden, they filled her now with a sudden rage of shame. Her face flamed and she stamped her foot.

"How could I?" she fumed inwardly. "How could I sing such pitiful vulgar doggerel? And how dared he to listen? How dared he speak of love to me? He must be taught better manners. I will teach him."

A soft little purling cry at the window announced Pearl, who pushed through the casement and leapt down to Melisent's feet. She picked him up and buried her hot face in his thick fur. Pearl blinked in lazy rapture under her touch. He was a wise creature, a paragon of content, and preached but one gospel,

which Melisent received at that moment with understanding.

"Life is very nice," he purred, "when one takes everything as it comes without fretting or asking questions. Why, then, fret and ask questions? I do not, and see how happy I am."

Melisent felt strangely soothed and comforted. She sat down to her loom and worked, without thinking, till supper-time.

CHAPTER XXX

"Therefore like as May moneth flowereth and flourisheth in many gardens, so in likewise let every man of worship flourish his heart in this world; first unto God, and next unto the joy of them that he promiseth his faith unto. . . . Therefore, all ye that be lovers call unto your remembrance the moneth of May."

Malory.

"Her gesture, motion, and her smile,
Her wit, her voice my heart beguile,
Beguile my heart, I know not why,
And yet I love her till I die.

"Her free behaviour, winning looks,
Will make a lawyer burn his books.
I touched her not; alas! not I.
And yet I love her till I die."

Thomas Ford (*16th Century*).

A CUCKOO, most vainglorious of all the goddess Maia's court, announced her reign, and piped his own importance with vigorous insistence in the Dragon's Court. His queer, enharmonic call chimed with the swish, swish of a scythe in lush grass.

Swithun was making his first effort at mowing and found it warm work. Every now and then he stretched his back and mopped his brow with a long sigh. The use of the scythe had not been taught at any school in which he had been educated, and, to tell the truth, the moisture of his skin was partly due to fear. He had nearly cut off his left foot several times already, and saw no special reason why he should not yet do so. When he had borrowed the scythe, he had not conceived

the least suspicion of its dangerous possibilities, or known anything of its abominable treachery—how it can swoop round suddenly upon the amateur mower with vixenish malice and intent to maim. But having started to mow the rank grass of the Court, in order that Melisent should no longer have to wade through it, sometimes deep in dew, to reach her favourite seat, he was determined to finish it or lose a limb in the attempt!

To Melisent at her casement, his labour seemed a triumph of finished art. In her blissful ignorance she did not know the Herculean efforts required to mow down the long rough grasses without shearing off a foot. Swithun would have lost one of his feet long before had it not been for the strength of his hob-nailed boots. But he was becoming a little more expert as the sun rose higher in the heavens, and she looked on with high approval.

He was good to look upon, she thought, in his shirt-sleeves, with arms bare to the elbow and loose collar open at the throat; his yellow hair crisp and shining in the sun, his skin tanned healthily, his muscular figure curved in graceful lines. All the natural fancy of a young girl was enchained at the sight of this 'right manlike man as Nature shows she fain would make,' and Melisent's eyes often strayed from her lace-pillow. Fortunately, having come to an easy part of her design, she could work the bobbins almost mechanically, so that her divided attention did no harm.

"I have found two more nests this morning," Swithun said, resting from his toil and standing by the window. "One a blackbird's, with five young ones just hatched: the other a robin's, with four."

"Oh, I hope Pearl will not eat them!" cried

Melisent; "I am always afeard that he will, for although he knows it is a sin to eat birds, and flees from me if he has caught one, yet he seems unable to resist the temptation."

"They say robins eat the young buds of fruit-trees," observed Swithun; "and, if so, Pearl is our friend."

"But I do not believe that," said Melisent. "They seek only for grubs. And moreover, Swithun, I would far liefer they had the buds than cut off one day of their little lives. For life is so sweet to them in Spring-time. Hark how they sing of it—what rapture!"

"It is not life they sing of," he said.

"What then?" she asked.

"Love," he answered. "Even such love as the birds know is better than life—or rather—the better part, the most necessary part, of life."

"I do not know that," she murmured, wishing he would cease upon this subject, and yet fascinated by it.

"Would you like to know something of it," he said, coming nearer to the window and leaning his arms upon the sill. She started and did not answer.

"Let me tell you," he went on. "How it is such a strange and wonderful passion that it overleaps all barriers; how it ennobles the commonest lout and gives a man courage to dare—all things."

"I think," she stammered—"I . . . would rather not hear."

"Will you try to imagine," he said, ignoring her last words, "the case of a common man who dares to love a lady of high rank, as far above him in worldly station as she is in goodness and purity? Let it be granted that he worships her with his soul and without a desire but for her happiness and well-being. Tell me, then, if you think such love dishonours her?"

A crimson rose flowered in her cheeks, upon which her black lashes fell heavily.

"Ah, Swithun, do not . . . do not speak so!" she implored. "I cannot answer such a question. I have never thought of . . . like matters."

"Would such love dishonour her?" he persisted obstinately.

"No," said Melisent, after a long pause. "No, it would not—if——"

"If he asked for nothing in return, you would say. But suppose he did, what then? If her heart responded would she believe herself shamed and humiliated?"

Again Melisent did not reply at once. Her mind struggled in a chaos of conflicting emotions; desires, prejudices, fears, scruples paralyzed her tongue. But at last she faltered tremulously:

"I do not think love can shame a heart, if it be suffered alone, and in silence."

"And if you were the lady so loved by such a man," said Swithun, his voice growing lower and deeper with every word; "if your heart echoed to that love, what would you do? Would you dismiss him in scorn, or forget your rank and——"

"Never!" she interrupted, with a suddenness that startled him. "Never that. I would feel no shame at the love of a true man; no shame at the love I might have for him. But we are not all our own, to dispose of as we will. I am a de Paganel, the last of my race, and to that race I owe fealty. Thus would I rather lie dead, or take the vows of a nun, than sully the blood of a de Paganel by mating beneath my lineage. We have sunk low enough, God knoweth! We are fortuneless, landless, and our name hath no value in the eyes

of the world. Shall Melisent de Paganel put the last scorn upon it? *Never*—I swear to you—*never!* I would eat my own heart out sooner."

She met Swithun's eyes boldly now, her own flashing as with blue sparks. Her sweetness, gentleness, and timid manner had so completely veiled her pride that he had never suspected its passion, and this outbreak was a revelation. But it pleased him infinitely. There is a certain kind of strength in woman that pleases every man, and the stronger the man, the more he loves to encounter opposition. Swithun had ever loved obstacles for the pleasure of surmounting them, and his only regret now was that the present obstacle was not what it seemed. However, he made a feint of doing battle.

"I would quote to you, if I might do so without offence," he said.

"You may do so," said Melisent.

"It is a couplet written by Sir John Suckling:

> "'I hate a fool that starves her love
> Only to feed her pride,'"

he quoted. It was audacious; he knew it, and hoped thereby to see again that blue flash in her eyes. But it did not come. She lowered her eyelids to hide whatever emotion might lie under them, and said, in a quiet, proud voice:

"Better starve love than let it strangle honour."

Swithun adored her as he took up his scythe again and went back to his valiant work, while she turned to her lace-pillow. The cuckoo still chanted his mournful rhapsody; merles and throstles fluted; the shorn grass threw its enchanting perfume into the air. But that air now seemed charged with another element, the

subtle breath of passion: and it was almost a relief to Melisent when, a few minutes later, Verily entered the Dame's Parlour bearing in her hand a strange orange letter, which she carried at arm's length as if it were poisonous.

"It is one of those electric telegrams, Honeysweet, that we have heard tell of," she cried. "It hath come along the wires that run by the roads. Oh, God grant it bringeth not ill news—that the Master be not foully murdered in that city which is full of wicked people—thieves, assassins and the like! But maybe he is only married. Open quickly, dearling, and see."

Melisent's face was a picture of panic; eyes and mouth both round, the rose faded to an ivory pallor; and her hands trembled as she broke open the orange envelope.

Her eyes were misty with fear and her voice trembled as she read the telegram aloud. It was the first she had ever read. But its contents were not very terrible.

"We return by train arriving six forty-eight to-night. Send carriage to meet us and have rooms ready. Dinner at eight.

"DE PAGANEL."

"Returning to-night—*we!* Then Mr. Newman returns with him. Oh, why does he?" Melisent almost wailed.

"Dinner at eight—*dinner!*" ejaculated Verily, in a voice of deep concern. "It hath ever been supper before. Lord save us! It is easy to see that the Master hath been contaminated with new-fangled London ways and what all! There'll never be no pleasing him any more."

Swithun, leaning on his scythe, heard all this. He

met Melisent's distressful yearning look now and came to the window, as Verily went from the room grumbling.

"You have news, madam," he said, very respectfully.

"My father returns to-night—with Mr. Newman," she replied, holding out the telegram for him to see. "And, Swithun, you must go to the Chough and Crow and bid the carriage meet them at the station." At this she sighed.

"You did not expect Mr. de Paganel so soon?"

"He spoke of coming at the end of the week, in his last letter, but there hath been no news since Sunday. I did not think . . . we have nothing for—dinner."

"Leave that to me," he said. "I will bring something from the village."

"Ah, but you must not run us into debt, Swithun." She smiled wanly.

"There shall be no debt but mine to you," he muttered. She barely caught the last words.

"You owe me nothing. 'Tis I who am in debt to you for all your labour, all your kindness. And the thought that I can never repay——" Her voice broke.

"I am well paid so long as you let me serve you," he said. "To be near you, to see you sometimes, and hear you speak, is reward enough for any common man."

She moved away abruptly. At the door she turned and smiled sadly, opening her lips to speak. But no words came. The door closed behind her.

> "'I touched her not—alas! not I,
> And yet I love her till I die!'"

Swithun whispered to himself, as he took up his scythe.

CHAPTER XXXI

" Bid me despair and I'll despair
  Under the cypress tree ;
Or bid me die and I will dare
  E'en death to die for thee.
Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
  The very eyes of me,
And hath command of every part
  To live and die for thee."

Herrick.

THE blow fell and Verily was justified of her suspicions. Before Godwin de Paganel had been under his own roof twenty-four hours he conveyed to his daughter, in the most delicate and subtle way, the news that he was about to marry Lady Manwood. Melisent felt suddenly as if she had been frozen. She could not realize what had happened; but her first conscious thought was that this had been accomplished by Ivo Newman, for some reason of his own, as yet unrevealed. Her silence, blank face, and drooping eyes drew reproaches from her father.

" My child, you give me no joy of my new happiness," he said, gently drawing her to him and kissing her brow. " I would fain hear that you are not displeased. The lady will be as a dear and loving mother to you. She has told me that she loves you already."

" I am . . . not . . . displeased, my father . . . no . . . but I scarce know the lady," she murmured.

" You will soon know her better, Sweetheart."

"But she . . . when—when have you seen her? Have you been to the Hall?" she stammered.

"No; she has been in London the past few days, and it was then I learnt my fate. Truly I never expected the passion-flower to blossom in my life again, or my heart to o'errule my brain. But we are the sport of fate and I am but a mortal man, under the spell of a fascinating woman. Already that spell has unlocked my mind and made me long for fuller expression. And you have not yet heard about my book, Melisent, which a publisher is to print as soon as I have given it final revision. What, no word! Have you nothing to say, my child? Do you not, then, rejoice with your father? Have I so much failed in duty and kindliness towards you that you feel no sympathy in my joys and sorrows?"

Tears sprang to Melisent's eyes. She missed the old familiar 'thee' and 'thou' of her father's speech; he seemed to have become, all at once, a stranger to her. And the accusation of a lack of sympathy wounded her to the quick. She would have liked, she would have loved to feel in sympathy with him, and yet she could give nothing in return for his staggering news; because her soul was candid as a child's, and she could not pretend a joy she did not feel.

"You have taken me by surprise, sir," she faltered huskily. "And I am wondering, I cannot help wondering, how your great pride, the pride of a de Paganel, hath permitted you to offer marriage to a wealthy lady—you who have nothing but our name to bestow."

He flushed painfully and frowned upon her.

"There are some who would not say Godwin de Paganel has nothing to bestow save his name," he re-

torted sharply. "But it seems that my daughter has the lowest opinion of her father's value!"

A disagreeable silence ensued, upon which Mr. de Paganel coldly excused himself from her presence, and Melisent suffered the new agony of knowing she had deeply affronted his most sensitive vanity. She went back to her Parlour with a swelling heart and would have wept her eyes out but for fear that Newman should know and rejoice—or pity; she dreaded most of all the thought of his pity.

She was fighting down her anguish in a resolute attempt to work when the hated object of her thoughts entered and closed the door behind him She laid down her lace-pillow and rose, flinging back her head.

"You intrude, sir," she said, "upon my privacy. I am at work and beg no interruption."

"What a very ungracious reception!" he said, laughing and seating himself in the window-seat. A cigar was in his mouth. He knocked off the ashes on the window, and continued: "Don't be angry with me, pretty Millicent; for I am your true friend and you have cause to thank me, did you but know it."

"For bringing a lady here to take my place!"

"To take off your burdens, rather. Her money will help to prop up the fortunes of your house."

"At the price of my father's honour! I thank you."

"Little spitfire, how adorable you are! But don't talk nonsense, there's a good girl. Whatever dishonour can there be in your father's marrying a comfortable widow of good family connections?"

"It is quite impossible, sir," said Melisent, with great hauteur, "that you should ever comprehend the feelings of a de Paganel."

She seemed to have changed in a few weeks from a child to a woman, and her manner was so freezing that it would have withered a sensitive individual. But Newman was not sensitive ; a snub had no more effect upon him than a wasp-sting would have on a crocodile. He laughed again.

" I think I comprehend the feelings of Mr. Godwin de Paganel fairly well, however. He wishes to be happy, and amused, and adored, as most ordinary men do. But why you should suppose I had anything to do with his matrimonial arrangements is beyond my ken. Surely you do not accuse your father of being my tool. He may be weak, but——"

" Silence, sir !" raged Melisent, stamping her foot. " I will not hear you speak of my father. If you do not quit this room immediately, I will do so." And she walked to the door. He barred the way.

" You will be wiser to remain until you have heard what I have to say," he said coolly. " I advise you not to quarrel with me, as I am in a position to make matters extremely uncomfortable for you, and your father, if you do. In accusing me of having arranged the match between your father and Lady Manwood you flatter me more than you flatter him. But consider a moment. If this is the case, why have I done so ? What reason have I had for coming here and pulling wires ? What has been my object in taking your father to London and settling about the publication of his book ? Do you fondly imagine that book will be published for nothing ? Have you asked yourself where the money to pay for its printing is to come from ? Perhaps it will be as well for you to face all the facts before you, and then you may be able to judge whether it will be better for you to have me on

your side or against you. At present I am, as I have told you, your friend—your lover."

Melisent bit her lip. "A good friend—a true lover!" she cried ironically.

"'All's fair in love and war,' little beauty. You must admit that I have no reason to be grateful to you, or to love you, but I do. And I mean to win you, in spite of your de Paganel blood, de Paganel pride, de Paganel pig-headedness."

"I will die sooner!" she exclaimed passionately.

"I hope not. Death is a very unpleasant thing. 'Better be a coward for five minutes than a dead man all your life,' as the Irishman said."

That he could jest while she was in such distress seemed to Melisent little short of devilish. She could have killed him at that moment. But she stood still, white as ashes to her lips, trembling in every limb, but with firm mouth and flashing eyes. Perhaps he saw that he had gone too far; for he continued, in his sweetest voice and without the mocking smile: "I have seemed hard on you, but, believe me, that is not how I feel. I should like nothing better in this world than to see you the happiest of women. Say you believe this."

"How can I believe it?"

"You will some day. I have told you brutal truths only to warn you of my power. But I will never exert that power against you if you will but grant me the consideration every man has a right to expect from the woman to whom he offers a lifelong devotion; the consideration that every guest has a right to expect from his hostess."

This reproof touched her more than anything he had said.

"I have been distraught," she murmured. "I hardly know what I was saying. The world seems tumbling to pieces about me. I must have time to think, to grow used to the——" She stopped, afraid to proceed lest her voice should turn to a wail.

"Will you meet me here to-morrow at noon?" he said gently, and even humbly. "I have a great deal yet to say to you, and shall be able to tell you more then than I can now. Something will have happened by that time, I trust, which will make a change in both our lives, yours and mine. Grant me an interview, when you have thought over all I have said, and try to think of me as kindly as you can; for I swear you have been cruelly unjust to me so far."

Had she? Melisent asked herself. Her mind strove in a tumult of thoughts and impressions.

"I will see you," she said at last, "but not here. It is so stifling. I . . . I cannot bear it. Come to me in the Dragon's Court at noon."

"Where one may be overheard," he demurred.

"If you have aught to say that is not fit to be overheard," she said, "I will not hear it. I will meet you only in the Dragon's Court, for there I am under God's own Heaven and have the sweet air all around me. There or nowhere."

"At noon, then," he agreed, and left her.

Melisent went to the window-sill, where the end of his cigar still lay smoking, and flung it as far out as her arm could project it. This passionately childish action gave her a slight relief. She hated everything he touched now, and feared him with a far more definite fear than ever before. Had he not admitted that he held her in his power, that he was winding serpent coils about her? She shivered convulsively in the

cool air from the window, and a sob escaped her, the pent-up sob that had ached in her throat for hours.

Swithun, standing in the shadow of the Dragon heard it and came forward. His hands were clenched, his mouth set, and in his dark eyes blazed a fire of passion she had never seen there before.

"If I can kill anyone for you," he said, between his teeth, "it will give me great satisfaction."

This extravagance saved the situation. It had a tinge of humour in its ferocity. They both smiled unsteadily.

"Killing were no good, Swithun," she said, in a strange voice. "It would not mend matters. If you killed the Stranger, it would not prevent my father's marriage."

"He is to marry Lady Manwood, then, as Verily foretold."

"Ay. Mr. Newman hath cozened him into it. He would never have thought of it unaided. But 'tis all arranged now and I . . . I have no longer any place in my father's thoughts. He hath pleased himself . . . and the Stranger . . . without——" She struggled, and then broke down altogether. Swithun wanted to turn and flee. Her distress was like a poisoned arrow, wounding and inflaming him. But she soon commanded herself, and her eyes looked out of their bath of shining tears, bright and resolute.

"There is more behind. My father hath incurred a debt for the payment of printing his book. The Stranger hints that he holds us in his power. I have promised to meet him to-morrow at noon in the Dragon's Court—but perhaps you were listening, Swithun."

"I—listening!" he exclaimed. "You think I would spy upon you!"

"No, no, but . . . you were outside . . . the window open . , , you may have heard."

"I heard nothing but your voice and Newman's, a word, perhaps, here and there, no more," he vowed. "I was waiting there lest you should call me."

"And that is what I wish you should do to-morrow, at noon," she said. "For that reason I told the Stranger I would see him only in the Dragon's Court. I will not be shut into a room with him; he sucks the very air out of it—he poisons it! Will you be near, Swithun, concealed? You may even listen, if it so please you. And then, if I need you, I will call."

"You may count upon me," he answered gravely.

"I thank you, Swithun, my good friend," she said. And her eyes spoke even more gratitude than her words.

CHAPTER XXXII

" Be merry, Friends, take ye no thought,
For worldly cares care ye right nought.
For whoso doth, when all is sought,
Shall find that thought availeth nought.
Be merry, Friends."
John Heywood.

" For trewly than I feare no-man
be he neuer so bolde
when I am armed and throwly warmed
with joly goode ale and old."
John Still.

THE night was well advanced and the usual jocund gathering in the bar-parlour of the Chough and Crow was fast reaching a stage of ripe hilarity, when Swithun entered and called for his usual pint. The sour odour of alcohol, mingled with rank tobacco and corduroy, made the close air of the confined space stifling, but nobody present seemed to notice it save Swithun, who took a seat as near the door as possible. He was greeted with friendly words and some chaff, especially as to his clean linen, when he took off his coat, according to precedent, and sat down in his shirt-sleeves with the rest. But the chaff was tempered by a respect which he knew was due to the fact that he came from Paganel Garth, and not to any special distinction of his own.

He was surprised to find on this night that there was no singing of lugubrious songs about dead Willies or Gipsy Countesses such as he had been accustomed to hear, sung at a funereal pace, with a chorus lagging

several crotchets behind the solo voice. The order of the evening was story-telling, and in the midst of the little agricultural assembly there sat a seafaring man, tanned, grizzled and bearded, who told ship yarns of the most blood-curdling nature, with obvious relish. He smoked plug tobacco in a pipe of clay with an extremely long stem, and interrupted the thread of his discourse many times to express his pleasure in once more laying his claws upon a real old 'churchwarden.'

His listeners sat entranced. All their native distrust of a stranger had worn off before Swithun entered, for a cordial request that he might stand a drink all round had established the tar on a friendly and familiar footing with his company. At first Swithun, absorbed in his own thoughts, hardly listened to his garrulous talk, but presently he found himself laughing with the rest. The fellow was certainly irresistible.

His manner of speech was original and beyond reproduction. Quaint, rollicking, racy, full of strange terms and twists of language, it combined with his infectious laugh and facial expression to hold his listeners enthralled. He was telling a yarn of sailors' superstitions when Swithun's attention was arrested, a thrilling narrative about a murdered captain who haunted the hold of a ship he had sailed in some years ago, and whom he, the narrator, had interviewed. There had been a wager on board, laid by a shipmate, that no man dared go down into the hold at midnight with a pack of cards and challenge the dead skipper to play with him. This wager he had resolved to win, and very graphic was his description of the way in which he ventured down into the dark place with a hurricane lamp in his hand and a pack of cards in his pocket.

"Wi' me pins a-trembling like a t'gallan'-mast in a gale, I lifts off the fore-'atch and goes down the ladder into the black darkness, which smelt all rotten wi' death, and it seemed as if a legion o' devils riz up outer the shadders to gibber at me. But I didn't give a damn and went down wi' all canvas set, till the blasted lamp begun to burn bluey-green and the niff were worse nor a cargo o' guano. Then, when I felt my feet touch keelsom, I plants 'em well down and hangs on to the ladder and sings out: 'Who'll have a game o' Slippery Sam wi' me to-night?'"

A shudder went round the spellbound audience and a murmur of "Well, now, if he worn't a good plucked un," as the sailor took a long drink and continued:

"The first time there never came no answer, so I lifted up my foghorn again and bawled, wi' stretched lungs: 'Any lubber come and have a game o' Slippery Sam wi' me to-night?' Them as were standing up above listening said it frez their marrow to hear me! There weren't no sound for a bit, and then there comes the most horful, onearthly, hair-lifting groan quite close by where I were standing, which made me jump a'most out o' my blighted skin. I begun a-shivering and shaking like a man wi' the quartan ague; but I weren't goin' to 'bout ship after I'd gone so far, so I sung out for the third and last time: 'If anybody, living or dead, wants to play cards to-night, now's his chance. He won't get another this passage.' Which were Gospel truth. There weren't another man aboard that old windbag, not even the Skipper hisself, would ha' gone down to that hold and done what I done."

He wagged his head with much satisfaction and began to pull energetically at his churchwarden, while

a chorus of inquiry was hurled at him by his thrilled and eager audience.

"What happened? Well, I'm tellin' yer. There I stood wi' the blood a'most oozing outer my pores, and my knees a-wambling like a land-lubber's aboard, when I heard again that horful groan, coming, so to speak, from the bowels o' the deep, and there riz up afore me very eyes such a gashly sight as I wish-a-ma-never see again in all my born days. My tongue seemed kinder frez to me teeth wi' horror. I begun trying ter recollect the prayers I uster say at my mother's knee when a nipper. For I tell yer, mates, I were about scared into Kingdom come."

"What wor it like?" breathed an awed voice.

"Like nothing on earth as you've ever seen, my lad, nor any other mortal man as lived to tell the tale. 'Twere all smudgy-like and dripping wi' green slime, with its eyeballs a-standing out, and its jaw flopping down loose. Split my timbers!" he ejaculated suddenly, "if it don't gi' me the crawls to think on it—even now."

A stir of horror went round the group of men.

"That's a bit worser nor your ghost, Maundy," said one of the audience to the shepherd whose story Swithun had heard the last time he was at the Chough and Crow.

A grunt was the only response. No man likes the experience of another to transcend his own.

"Shut your jaw, Billy. We ain't 'eared the end on't yet," said another. "And did the dead man play cards wi' ye, Skipper?"

This title evidently pleased the seafaring man, for he smiled complacently as he shook his head.

"Not in these boots—no blanky fear! I didn't

give it no chance, you bet! I can tell yer, mates, I taken just about as long to get outer that hold as it takes a hungry dog to swaller a lump o' meat. But I won my bet, and that were all I wanted. 'Twere a fool game and a wonder I didn't die o' funk. I wouldn't try it again, not for a barrel o' whisky a day."

A buzz of excitement, admiration and speculation arose; pipes and glasses were replenished and a clamour of voices was heard, in which each man strove against the rest to narrate some peculiarly thrilling experience of his own. But all the stories were tame in comparison with that of the stranger, who had the gift of the born story-teller, and as soon as he raised his voice again in a yarn concerned with a pirate craft and a skirmish with knives, the clamour of the others subsided. His vivid description of the sea "so thick wi' blood as it seemed more red nor blue" impressed them even more than the Skipper's ghost had done.

"You seem to be of a venturesome turn, mate," said Swithun, in a pause of the conversation.

The sailor spat on the floor and laughed his jolly laugh.

"I'll warrant I must be that or I wouldn't ha' bin spliced and begot a family o' nine afore I were thirty," he said. "Getting spliced is the most perilous adventure by land *or* sea, 'cause you never know what sort of a rotten barque you've tied up to, or when she's goin' to run a-muck. Mine happened to be sound and saving, though rather too fond o' child-bearing for a thrifty man. But the Lord were merciful and took the weak uns, four on 'em—and her too, poor soul—a year ago come Lady Day."

"Are you brought up your sons to the sea, Skipper?"

asked the father of three plough-boys and a crow-scarer.

"Well, well, what do *you* think? Three of 'em is afore the stick now, and doin' well."

"And the rest?" asked Swithun.

"The rest be wenches—bless their pretty hearts!" said the sailor affectionately; and, lifting his tankard he added: "Here's to 'em, and all the lovely sex, says I. I never yet seen one under sixty as I couldn't love."

A roar of laughter greeted this gallant speech, and the toast was drunk with roistering enthusiasm. When comparative peace was restored, a young labourer inquired timidly whether any of the sailor's daughters were wed. He turned on the questioner with a twinkle in his very blue eyes:

"Now, that sounds like business," he observed. "Wed, did you say? Two of 'em is spliced and mothers o' families. But one's in service at Bermuda; one's going to be a school-marm, and the youngest lives wi' the eldest. Them three be all unbespoke, if you want to try your luck, mate."

There was another outburst of rustic mirth, and then Swithun said:

"Then you haven't any home ties, Skipper?"

A comical twinkle appeared in the man's eyes as he answered:

"No, mate; not at present. But I ain't too old to go courtin' again; am I?"

"I expect you've saved a tidy bit," said one; "being as there ain't no shops or pubs on the ocean."

"Don't you worry about that, Johnny," was the answer; "there's always doors open for gold and silver, even on the briny. But him as is more'n half-baked knows how to keep his two hands out of his

breeches pockets. I never was one o' them as the song tells on." And he sang out :

"'A-rovin', a-rovin',
For rovin's been my ru-u-in—
I'll go no more a-ro-o-vin'
Wi' you, fair maid.'"

The company applauded and demanded the rest of the song. He was only too willing to respond, and upon receiving the compliment of an encore volunteered a ship 'shanty,' which was hailed with delight. He took another drink and started in a voice that shook the rafters :

"'A Yankee ship came down the river—
Blow, boys, blow—
A Yankee ship came down the river—
Blow, boys, Billy boys, blow.'"

There were many verses and he requested his 'mates' to join the refrain, which they did with gusto. When he had come to the end, he emptied his tankard, pushed it across the bar to be refilled and began another shanty, without invitation. This time the subject was topical and enjoyed even more favour than the first.

"'Ho! whisky is the life of man—
Oh, whisky, Johnny—
Ho! whisky is the life of man.
Whisky for my Johnnies.

"'Ho! I wish I knew where whisky grew—
Oh, whisky, Johnny—
I'd drink the leaves and the branches too,
Whisky for my Johnnies.

"'Ho! whisky made me pawn my clothes—
Oh, whisky Johnny—
And whisky gave me a broken nose—
Whisky for my Johnnies.'"

The excitement became intense. All the men were stamping and roaring out the refrain. Swithun had never seen the phlegmatic labourers so animated and well entertained. The stranger finally volunteered a hornpipe and the floor was cleared for him, while all the men stood round by the walls. A wheezy old concertina was produced from somewhere and the musician of the assembly ground out the Sailor's Hornpipe with unwonted energy.

But the player's energy was nothing to that of the dancer. He could not have been less than fifty years old, and was probably a good deal older, but he danced with the ease, grace and lightness of a girl, putting in all the steps and actions of this enchanting dance as if he had but just learnt it at school. As he had been steadily imbibing grog ever since he had entered the tavern his precision and steadiness, in the over-heated and fœtid atmosphere, were truly amazing. He concluded amid shouts of applause and made for the porch, where Swithun was standing.

"Not quite so cool as the upper deck with a nor'-easter blowing," he remarked.

Swithun invited him to another drink. "I reckon," he said, "you've proved your right to go courting again. Why, man, you dance like a ten-year-old!"

"You'll put in a word for me, then," said the sailor, chuckling.

"Right you are. Only show me the lass," replied Swithun.

The seafarer screwed up his mouth and one eye in a prolonged wink at the company.

"One for me and two for hisself, eh, mates? Well, there's no fool like an old fool I know, but I'm not such a jackass as to take the likes o' him wi' me when

I go a-courting. No fear! And, what's more, I'm not such a Juggins as to court a young wench at all. The young uns allus want to go gallivanting and flinging up their heels all over the place. Gi' me the lass as can keep a home straight and make you comfor'ble. At my time o' life a man don't set no store on cherry lips; all he wants is a pair o' willing hands and a quiet tongue."

"'Ear, 'ear!" came a chorus.

"It strikes me," said Swithun, watching him narrowly, "you've got a wife in your eye already."

The man's face became one huge wink again. He opened his mouth to speak, but changed his mind and turned to his grog.

"Past eleven o'clock, friends," observed the host of the Chough and Crow, gently and regretfully, looking at his watch.

They all tumbled out into the road a few minutes later, a noisy crew, and somewhat top-heavy, but very happy. The seafaring man was the steadiest of the lot, though he had drunk by far the most liquor. He was lodging at the Inn, but must have a mouthful of fresh air, he said, and was rolling away with the rest when Swithun touched his arm and drew him aside.

"Do you want a paying job, mate?" he whispered.

The man wheeled round and faced him in surprise, as the others went singing down the village.

"You like a bit of adventure and you're afraid of nothing," continued Swithun. "So I want you just to come along with me. That is, if you can keep a secret. If you can't, the job's off."

"Who the devil are you?" was the rejoinder, inquisitive, but not suspicious.

"I'm called Kit Swithun, and I'm gardener up at Paganel Garth, the big house near by."

The sailor started and stared at him.

"What's that? Paganel Garth! Bless my eyes—you don't say!"

"You know it," said Swithun. "I thought so. I felt sure you were no stranger to these parts. But that's all right. The thing is—can you keep a secret?"

"Can I lap whisky?" was the response. "Yes, mate, I guess I can keep a secret—when it's made worth my while."

"It will be a ten-pound job," said Swithun.

The man whistled. "Good enough. But who's goin' to fork it out?"

"I——" began Swithun, paused and fished a handful of gold from his pocket. "Here's what I've had given me to pay the piper," he said. "But if you're afraid to take it on, I'll soon get someone else."

The tar gave him another prolonged and penetrating stare, with his shrewd and twinkling eyes.

"You ain't no gardener; you're a gentleman," he pronounced, after this inspection. "But what the devil you're up to, I'm blowed if I know."

"Never mind what I am, or what I'm up to," said Swithun impatiently. "Time's flying and I can't hang about all night. Are you coming along with me or not? I'll show you what the job is, and I've told you the price. You can take it or leave it, as you please. But it's no good fooling over it."

The seafaring man whistled a stave of his last shanty, looked up the road and down the road, hitched up his trousers and spat upon the grass. Then he exploded in a short laugh.

"Well of all——! Blowed if I don't take it on!" he said finally, and the two walked along together.

They reached Paganel Garth, and Swithun led him

round to the back, where they could get into the garden over the low wall at the foot of the terrace, the same Shepherd Maundy and his friend had climbed over.

It was a dark night, and rain-clouds lowered beneath the stars. Swithun left his man at the entrance to the Dragon's Court and bade him wait there for him while he went to find something. In a few minutes he returned with two long dark cloaks one of which he put on himself, the other he gave to his recruit.

"If you see or hear anything," he said, "slip the hood over your head and slide away as quickly as you can. There's a window just above which overlooks us, so it will be necessary to work quietly and without speaking. Come."

"I wish I knew what you were at," the man grumbled. "This may be a penal job, so far as I know. If it's house-cracking, I'm off."

Swithun said something swiftly, in a low voice, at his ear. The sailor jumped.

"What's that?" he ejaculated. "Gawd bless my stars!—you—well—didn't I say——"

Swithun checked his exuberant surprise, imposed silence and led him up to the Dragon's Court. The great stone beast squatted in the grass like a blotch of deeper shadow in the darkness.

They went round to the side of it, the side that lay farthest from the house windows, and Swithun stooped down.

"You see, here," he whispered, "is a loose stone, held fast by the Dragon's forepaws and body. We have to move them and shift the stone. I couldn't do it alone, but you seem a strong man and together we ought to manage it."

"Right you are, sir, I'm on," said the sailor.

CHAPTER XXXIII

" The thing they here call Love is blind Desire,
  Armed with bows, shafts and fire
Inconstant like the sea, of whence 'tis born,
  Rough swelling like a storm ;
With whom who sails rides on a surge of fear.

" . . . Now true Love
  No such effect doth prove.
That is an essence far more gentle, fine,
  Pure, perfect, nay, divine,
It is a golden chain let down from Heaven."

Ben Jonson.

It was a wan-faced trembling maiden the sun smiled on next morning, as she threaded the green alleys of the garden, while he cast the black shadow of the dial's point across figure XII. and another line as dark from the house gable across the Dragon's Court. Melisent had not slept all night, and her vigil had drained the usual bright colour from her cheeks, strength from her body. She felt faint and sick with a panic dread of she knew not what, and even the gay sweet voices of the birds, the aromatic air, could not revive her spirits or give her courage. This Swithun tried to do as she passed him, where he stood upon a chair, clipping one of the tall yew-hedges. He paused, as she came by, and spoke, but without moving or shifting his eyes.

" Fear nothing. I shall be near."

She rewarded him with a grateful smile, and he grieved to see the sadness of it, her pale face and heavy eyes. He continued his clipping with great energy

and did not even turn to answer a passing salute from Ivo Newman, who went by a few minutes later, with a buoyant tread and the jauntiness of a favoured lover.

Melisent sat in her rustic seat opposite the Dragon's gaping jaws, with a quickly throbbing heart and trembling hands, which she clasped and unclasped nervously. She wore her usual morning gown of flowered lilac print, with its loosely gathered skirt and pointed bodice, folded about the neck with a lawn kerchief. At her neck was a narrow band of black velvet crossed in front, over the little white hollow at the base of her throat, and pinned with a tiny heart of beryl set in pearls. The delicate whiteness of her skin, the strip of velvet and the inky black of her hair, made her face like an exquisite cameo: and so thought Ivo Newman as he came near. Her eyes, so purely blue over coral-tinted cheeks, were but a deep grey this morning, set in their circle of dark brows above and shadows beneath. She raised them only for a moment as Newman came forward and seated himself by her; then the sweeping lashes fell and it was some time before he saw their colour again. Pearl, who had been seated at her feet, washing one ear, fled at the sight of the Stranger, and they had the Dragon's Court to themselves.

"Millicent," said Newman, a little huskily, for he, too, was somewhat nervous, "you know what I wish to say to you. I have told you more than once what is my hope. But I don't think you can realize how much I love you, what havoc you have made in my life. I came here to pursue one purpose, of which I mean to speak to you; but that purpose has become entirely subservient to another. I can think of nothing else but you, darling, day and night."

She was silent. He had taken her hand and she let it lie passively in his, for she felt it useless to struggle, and she must hear all he had to say. His voice was almost painfully sweet as he went on:

"I think you overthrew me at the first hour, from the moment when I saw you fencing in the twilight, beautiful as a dream and most womanly in your half-masculine attire. I felt then as I had never felt before at the mere sight of a woman, a fearful and mysterious attraction. But it was not until later that I knew I adored you and resolved to win you, against all obstacles.

"Tell me," said Melisent, with dry lips and averted eyes, "your design . . . before you came. I desire to hear only of that."

"I will tell you," he replied. "It is a long story, but I will make it as short as I can." He let her hand go, flung his right knee over the other and let his left arm lie along the back of the seat behind her. She sat forward, with eyes fixed on the base of the Dragon. He watched her face as he spoke.

"A few years ago," he said, "there met in London a certain group of men who called themselves a Limited Company. I need not tell you the object of that Company, as you would not understand. You, probably, do not even know what a Limited Company is" —she shook her head slightly—"I thought not. Well, they were all business men and their chief object in life was to make money. To this end they were intent upon bringing out, making known and selling in the markets of the world a certain new and potential chemical substance which they believed would oust certain other things and bring in a fortune to its producers. They invited a celebrated chemist and

scientist who was credited with some important discoveries, especially concerned with this newly-found chemical, to be their adviser; and, after several meetings, where he afforded them very valuable expert opinion upon which they could base their proceedings, the whole Company—about a dozen men—gave a dinner to him at one of the best London hotels. Do you follow me?"

"Quite." She did not raise her eyes.

"After this dinner," he continued, "which was of a friendly and informal character, the Company, several of whom were clever men, not merely in business but interested in science and other intellectual pursuits, fell to talking on matters outside the limited range of their own particular interests, and Sir —— the chemical expert was induced to express his views as to the nature of certain discoveries he had made. He had, no doubt, as all the rest, taken a certain amount of wine, which loosened his tongue and made his speech a trifle unguarded, as an after-dinner speech is apt to be. And among other things he touched on a subject which has been considered, for many years, as a fraud of charlatans, unworthy the notice of scientists, the subject of Alchemy."

Melisent started and raised her eyes for a moment.

"This man," continued Newman, "held rather peculiar views about Alchemy, and at first he was laughed at by the rest. But they grew impressed, after a time, when he had expounded his reasons, and were absorbingly interested in what he had to say, especially two of those present. Well, to cut a long story as short as possible, their interest was most tremendously increased when . . . the chemist asserted his belief, and gave some excellent reasons for believing, that in a

certain very old country house, belonging to an impoverished English gentleman, there existed, at that moment, a lost link between ancient and modern chemical science, being no less, in fact, than the so-called Philosopher's Stone. In plain and comprehensible language, the secret of the art of making gold by alchemical methods."

Melisent begun to breathe more quickly and raised her eyes to the speaker's face, where they rested, absorbed.

"The owner of the house," he went on, "was, according to our chemist, entirely unaware of his valuable possession, which had lain hidden, as a guilty, illegal and dangerous secret, for several centuries; and it was only by an accident—the discovery of a document corresponding with other discoveries of his own—that its existence had now been revealed, not to the owner, but to this scientific gentleman. He concluded by stating his conviction that, if a thorough investigation of the house in question could be made, there would be a revelation to startle the world. And he sketched so charming a fairy-tale of hidden treasure that he fired the imaginations of these unimaginative business men, together with their cupidity, and set them plotting."

"And the old house," exclaimed Melisent, "did he tell them the name of it?"

"Not then. And of course they respected his suppression of any data that might give them the chance of making independent inquiries. But, a few days later, one of the two men, of whom I have spoken as being specially interested, managed to worm out of him sufficient details to identify the house. Perhaps you can guess its name."

"Paganel Garth," she murmured.

"Yes."

There was a short pause.

"Were, then, you," she demanded, "the creature who wormed himself into the confidence of that man of science?"

"I was not. I have never seen him. But I have been employed by that Limited Company to win my way into Paganel Garth and find out—what I could."

"I apprehend—a spy!" She sprang to her feet.

"Almost more than a mere ordinary spy," said Newman coolly: "I came here as a kind of—what shall I say?—ferret."

"A noble animal!" Her scorn was superb. "And what have you found, pray, as a guerdon for such loathly work?"

"Enough, at least, to convince me that this house is worth buying for my clients; that it contains sufficient treasure, even without the chimerical man-made gold, to be worth risking £100,000 on it. And I have received orders from my clients to offer that sum to Mr. de Paganel for its purchase."

"An offer," she exclaimed breathlessly, for the shock of his words overwhelmed her, "that will never be accepted."

"An offer which has already been accepted," said Newman, smiling.

Melisent gazed at him with dilated eyes of horror, momentarily speechless. That her father could sell the hallowed home of their race was a possibility her mind refused to grasp.

"It cannot, cannot be! I will not believe it."

"You will find that it is true, lovely girl. The deed of conveyance is drawn up and was to have been signed

this morning, an hour ago, if the lawyer we have engaged had appeared. He has probably missed the early train, but should be here shortly. Your father is quite satisfied with his bargain."

"Satisfied!" she echoed in an agonized voice. "Quite satisfied—oh, never! You have cozened him, bewildered him, changed his very nature. A month ago he would not have sold his house, his precious books, for all the gold of the Indies. He must be distraught—I will go to him." She would have fled, but Newman held her.

"Do not be hasty," he said. "Mr. de Paganel is quite in his right mind and, I tell you, he is content. He has made a condition that he is to keep certain of his books, some of the most valuable, no doubt, so that he does not give up everything, as you suppose. And I have not bewitched him. I have only used common-sense arguments. The house is falling to pieces, the Library itself is a prey to rats and mice, many of the books are already badly gnawed. His life, hitherto, has been one of dull tiresome monotony, and he is, as you must be aware, a man fitted to shine in society, to take his proper place at Court and maintain the honour and glory of his illustrious name. I can never understand how he has consented to be buried here so long. Now that his eyes are opened he wonders too! The money he will gain by the sale of this mouldy, crumbling, wretched old place, and his marriage with Lady Manwood, will reinstate him in his proper position. If you are the good and unselfish daughter I have thought you, you must see that it is for his welfare to sell the place. And for your own also."

Melisent sat back in her seat again and held her

head in her hands, for it seemed to her that it would split with the anguish of this second bereavement. To lose her father, to learn that his affection had been given to another, was pain hard enough to bear; but the thought of seeing her cherished home—the home of her forebears, with its beloved Library and garden, its sacred Chapel guarding her mother's bones, its dear and glorious associations—in the hands of strangers was a torture that crushed her to the earth. She had never realized before how she loved it, every crumbling stone of it, every musty room, mouse-nibbled wainscot, moth-eaten arras. Her very life seemed bound up in it and she could not imagine herself deprived of its shelter. The face she lifted to Newman, after a few minutes of this unspeakable woe, was tragic.

"You will not—you cannot be so cruel as to take my home from me . . . everything . . . everything I love!" she said.

Her voice faltered away in a sob. He seized her hands and held them firmly.

"Have I not said I love you?" he whispered. "And does not that mean I cannot hurt you, that I am ready to sacrifice everything to you, even my business honour? Millicent, I came here to secure this house for the Company that has employed me, to get it into their hands before Sir Christopher Manwood could lay hands on it. Don't start. Have you not guessed that he is the scientist I spoke of, who thought he had discovered a secret and gave it away—like a fool—to a party of wily men? I am told he is mooning away in Germany just now, fussing over a lot of abstract theorems, and collecting data for his alchemical hypothesis. Half your scientific men are unpractical dreamers, poets gone wrong, and thus they leave the way open for

practical men to step in and snatch the profits of their inventions and discoveries. I have stepped in here and spiked his gun. When he returns, he will find Paganel Garth no longer available for his investigations. It will be in the hands of expert valuers and under minute inspection . . . unless——" He paused, and kissed her hands.

"Unless——" she reiterated.

"Unless you will remain here, *with me.*"

"Ah never!" she exclaimed, trying to free her hands from his grip.

"Do not decide hurriedly. Think what I am offering you, and what it means to me. If I keep this house in my own hands I must betray those to whom I am pledged to secure it, and bear the brand of dishonour. I will do that for you, rather than that you shall be turned adrift from your home. Millicent—Millicent—you whom I love so much—you must listen, you must return some fraction of what I feel for you. Love begets love. You cannot be so hard, so obdurate, so pitiless!"

His honeyed voice had grown strangely harsh and husky. There could be no doubt he lay under the stress of deep emotion; but Melisent saw and felt his passion unmoved; it could not touch her. Her mind was centred on one thought. He had come there to ruin them, to make himself master of her father, herself, and Paganel Garth. The thought maddened her.

"Love you!" she uttered, almost under her breath. "Love you—whom I hate and loathe! Live here with you! God in Heaven! I would take my life with my own hands sooner. Have you not come, like a thief in the night, to steal away all that I hold most dear and precious? Have you not poured your rank poison

into the ears of my father, flattered his vanity, and killed, not only his love for me, but for the home of his fathers? Have you not brought him to this vile dishonour of selling his birthright for a mess of pottage. Hath ever de Paganel taken gold for shame before? Never! We have lost all our money, all our land; but we had still left our honour—till you came! Now all is lost. I knew, as ever I set my eyes upon your face, that you boded us no good. You have plotted for our downfall—plotted, and schemed, and undermined, and lied. Can you think I would ever wed a traitor, a spy, and a robber!"

She tore herself apart from him and stood before him on the grass with her eyes flashing blue fire and her cheeks one crimson stain. In her childish and furious passion she was lovelier than he had ever seen her before and he lost his head. Before she could step back he had her in his arms.

"Cruel, cruel darling!" he murmured, his breath coming as fast as her own; "you do me injustice. I meant no harm, and only did the duty demanded of me. You are but a child, you do not understand. Don't struggle—you will only hurt yourself. Try to understand that all shall be as before. Your father shall have the money; you shall have the house, and I shall be yours—for ever! Don't be obstinate, foolish, mad. You will be sorry one day. Let me be your true friend and lover, and all will be well. I swear it. Only give me yourself and I will win your love in time, by ceaseless devotion."

She was fast and helpless in his arms and ceased to struggle, for her strength had ebbed. He waited a few moments for her answer, and it came between panting breaths.

"Never . . . never . . . never!"

"But you *shall!*"

He was no longer master of himself. Her opposition had roused the brute that lies in us, ever ready to awake and spring in such moments of ungovernable passion. His arms entwined her closer and his breath was upon her face.

"Swithun!" she wailed in despair.

"I am here."

The sound of that calm, temperate voice so near, was like a sudden stream of cold water; but its effect upon Newman was that of oil on a blazing fire.

"And why the devil are you here, sir?" he raged, facing round upon Swithun, who stood bare-headed in the sunlight, his shears still in his hands. "Why are you always spying upon your mistress? Are you paid to be spy and eavesdropper?"

"Yes," said Swithun: "or, at least I am *repaid* for my eavesdropping when I can be of service to my mistress."

"You allow insolence in your servants," Newman turned to Melisent.

"When they are insulted," she replied, trembling. "Swithun was hard by at my request, sir, lest I should need him."

"So that is the de Paganel notion of honourable conduct! To arrange an interview and then conceal a listener in ambush, as a spy and witness. Admirable dealing!"

"Perhaps it would be as well, sir, if you relieved Miss de Paganel of your presence," said Swithun, with a menacing light in his dark eyes.

Melisent experienced a new terror now, a fear lest these two should fall upon one another, for there was a

dangerous look upon both their faces. She dared not leave them ; she dared not speak, but held her breath in dread of what would happen next.

" If I have any more of your insolence, my man, I shall have you fired out of this place," said Newman, showing his teeth like an angry dog.

" If——" began Swithun, and paused, his sense of dignity commanding, just in time, the barbarian he had discovered in himself a few days earlier. Instead of finishing the sentence begun, he turned away with a smile. Melisent's wrath flamed up and courage returned.

" I would fain know what right is yours to speak thus to my gardener in my presence, sir," she said haughtily to Newman.

" Your gardener is fortunate in his champion," he sneered. " Few servants are permitted to insult their master's guests with impunity. But perhaps I may not find Mr. de Paganel so lenient."

Swithun turned, and for a moment the two men measured each other with flashing eyes. To Melisent nothing would have been more natural than to see them, there and then, engage in a hand-to-hand combat, as the heroes of old stories were ever wont to do ; for she knew nothing of the modern man. But before her dread could be realized or anything further happen they were, all three, paralyzed by a prodigy that sent the colour flying from their faces and a tremor through their limbs.

From the stone jaws of the Dragon there issued a most horrible and blood-curdling groan !

We all laugh at superstitions, and no man will ever admit that they have the slightest effect upon him ; but there lingers in every one of us a surviving remnant

of the old beliefs and fears of our ancestors. And, although it is an easy thing to ridicule these vague terrors of the unknown and invisible powers that may be round about us, it is not so easy to shake them off when we find ourselves in situations where the unaccountable triumphs over our reaton. We are all at times liable to shocks that seem to shake the citadel of common sense and scepticism.

Thus, at this moment, were three perfectly sane and sensible persons struck dumb with horror and amazement by the sound of this unearthly voice issuing from a throat of stone. Melisent turned faint and had to grasp the back of the garden seat for support. Newman's jaw fell and his teeth began to chatter. He went so far as to grab Swithun by the shoulder and hold on to him.

"What . . . what the devil——!" he stammered feebly.

Swithun, though at first startled out of his ordinary composure, drew a long breath and smiled. He held some clue to mysteries within and beneath the Dragon, and made a guess at the cause of the phenomenon.

"The Monster seems to be annoyed at something," he said, shaking off Newman's unwelcome clutch.

Another hollow groan rumbled from the Dragon's jaws. It was followed by a more weird bellow, and a procession of still stranger inarticulate noises. Even Swithun began to be perplexed and discomfited, while Melisent sank half-fainting on her seat. The strain she had gone through that morning, after her restless night, had exhausted her, and she heard in the Dragon's voice dire foreboding of the evil about to fall upon Paganel Garth. In a world of mysteries one mystery more does not seem beyond believing, and Melisent had lived surrounded by mystery. It was not the

first time, she thought, that God had spoken through lips of stone. She was familiar with many legendary examples of such miracles.

After the first pause, however, Newman's modern scepticism reasserted itself, and he began to suspect some chicanery.

"This is some damnable trick of yours, my man," he exclaimed, and strode towards the Dragon. But another bellow arrested his steps and he turned tail. His valour was not proof against such an infernal manifestation.

"I wish you joy of it, whatever it is," he ejaculated, with a short nervous laugh, and was going from the Court when there was a sound of approaching voices in the alley leading to it, and Mr. de Paganel appeared on the scene, accompanied by a somewhat elderly stranger.

"At last I have found you, Newman," he said, "after seeking you high and low. Mr. Blackstone Smart has arrived, you perceive, and I am at your service. But what ails my daughter?"

For Melisent was leaning back in her seat, white as curd, while Swithun stood by, fanning her with his cap and murmuring words of cheer.

She staggered to her feet and fell into her father's arms.

"The Dragon—he hath warned!" she gasped, and could say no more, but only cling to him, sobbing.

Thereupon the stone beast gave vent to another horrible bellow.

CHAPTER XXXIV

" Good name, in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls."
Shakespeare.

GODWIN DE PAGANEL and the London lawyer turned as pale as the other three when they heard the unearthly voice. Swithun, who, in spite of his guess at a possible solution of the mystery, was beginning to feel perturbed, resolved to put an end to conjecture and find out the truth.

" If you will come here, sir, I believe we may discover the cause of this apparent prodigy," he said to Mr. de Paganel, and the wondering group obediently followed him to the other side of the Dragon, where a surprise awaited Swithun. He had carefully closed up the aperture he had found 'beneath the Dragon's belly,' the night before, trailing ivy about it to conceal his operations. Now the ivy lay in a heap at the left of the opening, from which the stone had been again rolled, and a yawning hole in the earth was laid bare to the eyes of the astounded company. For a moment Swithun was seriously alarmed. Had he been betrayed and forestalled ? He shot an inquiring glance at Newman (who looked as innocently surprised as the rest), and, kneeling down beside the hole, peered down into the darkness.

His fears were instantly dispelled by the sound of a hoarse voice rising from below.

"Belay there, mate! For Gawd's sake tip us your fin and heave us outer this blanky place!" it roared.

There was a rattle of stones, a smothered oath, and a hairy hand gripped the one Swithun held down to it. Clambering up the crumbly steps out of the bowels of the earth appeared the seafaring man he had hired the night before, a queer-looking figure, unkempt and unwashen. Swithun was genuinely relieved. His first conclusion had been that the noise made by the Dragon had been caused by some current of air let loose in his work of the previous night, and, when driven from that hypothesis by the increasing loudness of the Dragon's bellow, he had feared interlopers. Now he could not help laughing as the man stood there blinking in the sunshine; nor could all the rest. Even Melisent, who had hardly recovered from her fright, smiled wanly.

"I thought I should make somebody hear if I kep' on hollering long enough," said the sailor, straightening his legs and pulling up his trousers. "It's a sight easier to get down there nor up. The t'gallan'-mast is nowt to it."

"And may I ask what you were doing down there?" demanded Swithun, trying to frown.

"Slumbering peaceful, Gov'nor," said the man, complacently. "You see, it were like this: when I gets back to the pub last night, the lubbers had all gone to bed and left me the key o' the street, which I didn't kinder fancy for a berth. I reckoned to get a cheap night's lodging down in that there hold, so I just turned in there. It weren't none too comfor'ble, as you may bet, but I can sleep a'most anywhere, specially when I oughter be awake. And I must ha' slep' pretty sound, seemingly, being as it's past noon."

He gave an expert glance at the sky as he spoke.

"May I ask the meaning of all this?" inquired Godwin de Paganel impatiently; "and who has been tampering with my property?"

"Before I explain, sir, as I am about to do, will you be good enough to look down here?" said Swithun, standing aside.

Mr. de Paganel did so, with eyes full of wonder.

"How did you find this?" he asked.

"It is a long story, which I shall be happy to tell you in detail later on. It is sufficient for me to say now that I have made a very important discovery, which affects you, sir, vitally. For some time I have been in possession of certain facts leading me to believe that there was something of great value concealed in your house; and I have now to confess, before your daughter and these other witnesses, that I came here under false pretences to make a search and verify my conclusions. There was no other way. You had refused to allow any investigation of your property, and closed your doors even to old friends. Perhaps you will forgive my trespass when I tell you that the search I have made has been crowned with success, and that, beneath our feet, as we stand here, I have discovered more than I sought, or even dreamt of finding—a very considerable quantity of almost virgin gold."

A thrill went through his listeners. De Paganel's face was a study in conflicting emotion.

"There is underneath us a chamber which is also entered by a subterranean passage from the Library," Swithun continued. "Its entrance is behind the bookshelves where lie Ansculf de Paganel's special books of Hermetic lore. He must have been a man quite

pre-eminent for learning and research, gifted almost beyond belief in scientific acumen. For I have found among his documents, unless I am greatly deceived, the Secret that has been lost to the world, the missing link of Alchemy, which some of us believe to have been discovered only to-day! To me, and, I venture to think, to the world generally, this is more valuable than the gold itself."

There was a prolonged pause of amazement, broken at last by the sailor, who softly uttered: "Gee-whoosh!"

"The Secret of the Dragon," Melisent murmured. A delicate colour had stolen back into her white cheeks.

"And may I ask," said Mr. de Paganel, recovering himself, "whose assurance I am called upon to accept for this most fantastic and incredible statement? I conclude from your speech that you are not what you have professed to be. On whose word, then, have I to rely?"

"On the word of Christopher Manwood," was the answer.

"Sir Christopher!" ejaculated de Paganel, faintly.

"Impossible!" murmured Melisent, with widening eyes.

"The Devil!" muttered Newman between his teeth, and ground his heel into the turf.

"It has been to my advantage that you did not recognize in me the boy you once knew so well," said Sir Christopher, as he must henceforth be called, "for, if you had, my plot would surely have failed. I must ask you to believe that I am your neighbour; at least until the fact is disproved. But I do not expect you to accept my 'fantastic statement' on my word alone. I wish to conduct you to the subterranean

chamber where I can show you all the evidence that appears to me conclusive. Everything remains, apparently untouched, exactly as Ansculf de Paganel left it—the furnace, the alembic, retorts, materials—a store of interesting old-world instruments that will be esteemed as throwing a light upon ancient methods of analysis and experiment. And, in order that you may not have to rely only upon my verdict, I have sent for a famous expert whom I am expecting to arrive every minute. He ought to be here now."

"There is no train from London until 2.30 this afternoon," said de Paganel.

"He is coming in my automobile," replied Sir Christopher. "You may have heard of Sir Douglas Peele, the highest authority in England on mineralogy and metallurgy. His verdict will put the matter to rest at once, one way or another. I am also expecting another visitor with him"—he paused and glanced at Ivo Newman—"your friend, sir, Lord Darchester."

Newman's face underwent a slight change, though he did not flinch, even to the quiver of an eyelid.

"The Earl of Darchester!" ejaculated Godwin de Paganel; "and may I ask to what cause I owe the honour of a visit from him?"

"He comes at my invitation to identify the gentleman who has been your guest for so long," said Christopher. "If you will read this letter, which I received a few days ago, you will see that he repudiates all knowledge of Mr. Ivo Newman."

He handed a letter to Mr. de Paganel as he spoke. To his honour be it said, he did not evince any sign of triumph over a vanquished rival. His mouth and eyes were grave, almost sad, as of a man accomplishing an unpleasant duty.

Ivo Newman's face turned livid, and his smile was set like that of a mask.

"I should think," he said, "that the evidence of a man who has entered Mr. de Paganel's house under admittedly false colours will have little weight. We do not even know whether this—gentleman's claim to the name and title of Sir Christopher Manwood has any foundation or not. The letter you hold in your hand, sir, may be a forgery. I demand the benefit of the doubt, at least till Lord Darchester arrives to confront me."

For the first time Sir Christopher Manwood felt a gleam of admiration for this man, who stood there smiling in the face of exposure and defeat. Despite the rage that must be surging through him, Newman remained outwardly calm, ready to make the most of every opportunity, and not yet prepared to surrender. A glance from him made the London lawyer step forward and say, blandly:

"I regret that, as our time here is limited, we must call upon Mr. de Paganel to let us proceed upon the business in hand for which we came. I presume the supposed discovery of hidden treasure will make no difference, sir, to your decision regarding the property and the deed we have drawn up for our client."

The palpable sneer of the words—'supposed discovery of hidden treasure'—was not lost on de Paganel, whose usual serenity was obviously ruffled, and whose eyes travelled from one face to the other of his visitors in grave doubt and perplexity.

Upon that moment of pause and incertitude broke the cracked voice of Verily, as she entered the Dragon's Court, breathless with excitement, her eyes like saucers.

"Please ye, Master, there be two grand gentlemen come in one of those new-fangled engines—which did nearly fright the breath outer my body—and Lady Manwood—all at once—to see you," she cried. "I ha' put the gentlemen i' the Library and the lady i' the withdrawing-room, where she awaits your pleasure."

"That she does not," said a laughing voice behind her, as Lady Manwood herself appeared. "You will, I am sure, forgive this early intrusion, my dear Mr. de Paganel—Godwin . . . but seeing my stepson's car at the gate, as I was accidentally passing, I could not resist coming in to see what he was doing here."

"Your servant, my lady," said Christopher, coming forward and touching his cap. Lady Manwood started and gave a little scream.

"My dear boy—what *are* you doing in those clothes?" she exclaimed.

"'Tis Kit Swithun, the Gardener, my lady," explained Verily, thinking her ladyship had suddenly taken leave of her senses.

"Kit Swithun, my good woman! Certainly not. This gentleman is Sir Christopher Manwood. You ought to know him," declared Lady Manwood.

Verily grew purple in the face.

"Good la! You don't say so, my lady. Sir Christopher . . . why . . . why, Honeysweet, 'tis Sir Christopher, and we've ordered him hither and thither and used him like any serving-man—and him a gentleman all the while, and a baronaught to boot. He'll never pardon us—never."

"You've used me uncommonly well, Verily, and here's my hand on it," said Sir Christopher, shaking hers warmly: "and, in reward for your kindness to me, I

am now going to make you happy ever after, as they do in the fairy-tale books. Look here!"

He was about to lead her to where the sailor stood leaning against the Dragon, meditatively chewing his plug; but before he could do so, the man had come forward and now stood eyeing her affectionately, with a smile on his humorous, weather-beaten face.

"Here I be, lass, at last," he said, as tranquilly as if they had been parted but for a few hours; "come home to wed ye, if you're still willin'."

With a frantic cry of joy Verily flew at him and flung both her arms round his neck.

"My Jehoram!" was all she could say, amid sobs.

The others turned away with tender smiles, forgetting, for the moment, their own engrossing interests in this touching reunion of old lovers. All but Ivo Newman, who needed all his own attention and mother-wit to extricate himself, without disgrace, from a difficult situation. He now came forward and spoke in his most mellifluous accents.

"As this seems to be a family gathering I feel myself distinctly *de trop*," he said, "and will inflict my uncongenial society upon you no longer. Good-bye, Mr. de Paganel"—he held out his hand—"and hearty thanks for your rare hospitality and kindness, which I have much enjoyed and can never forget. Miss Millicent, I am sorry to have offended you, but I beg you try to think the best you can of me. Remember, at least, that I would have sacrificed much to win your regard. Good-morning, Lady Manwood. I wish you every happiness in the future. Good-morning, Sir Christopher Manwood. I congratulate you on your successful strategy and immaculate sense of

honour. It is of an elastic and useful sort! You have won all I have lost, and it is for you to be generous to a fallen foe. I think you a bit of a sneak, but you've bested me, and I am bound to admire the man who can best Ivo Newman. 'All's fair in love and war.'"

"A sophistry invented by a knave to quiet a guilty conscience and quoted by knaves ever since to justify their actions," said Sir Christopher, turning from him contemptuously.

Newman flushed suddenly to his collar.

"The man who calls me knave must be prepared to substantiate his charge!" he said hotly.

Manwood wheeled round, and once more the two young men confronted one another with that look in their eyes Melisent had so much feared.

Mr. de Paganel observed it and stepped forward.

"Gentlemen, I trust there is no ill blood between you," he said, "and I am assured that if Sir Christopher Manwood hath said aught offensive to my friend Mr. Newman he will withdraw his words. I have found Mr. Newman a truly congenial companion and he hath opened to me channels of pleasure in more than one direction." He stooped to kiss Lady Manwood's hand, and continued—"I am not ungrateful to him for the many services he hath rendered me, and his most excellent company. Whatever may be his errors—which are common to all men—I desire to ignore them. And I see no reason for breaking my word to him. He hath made me a certain offer which I have accepted, and, although the deed of transference is not signed, I should not hold it worthy of the honour of a de Paganel to depart from my given word. Therefore, Mr. Newman, if you are ready, and you, sir"—to the lawyer—"we will repair to the house and conclude

this agreement. My daughter will entertain Lady Manwood and Sir Christopher in my absence."

Here was a check Christopher had not foreseen! He opened his lips to speak, and closed them again. After all, there was nothing to say.

Newman gazed at de Paganel with a new expression on his heavy, handsome face. His mouth trembled, his eyes grew moist. He made an attempt to speak, failed, tried again and spoke.

"Mr. de Paganel, until I met you I believe I did not know what a gentleman was," he said, trying to carry off his emotion with a careless laugh; "anyhow, I am proud of the honour of your acquaintance. But, although I may be the knave Sir Christopher Manwood has just called me, I have not fallen so low as to take an unfair advantage of one who has trusted me and treated me well. I must, therefore, give you back your word, sir, and decline to sign this agreement—at least, until I can do so with honour. The estate may be worth considerably more than you thought it was when you agreed to my terms."

"That makes no difference. I gave my word—it is my wish to proceed," declared Mr. de Paganel.

"If you can say that in a week's time, sir, I shall be entirely at your service," said Newman. "At present it is only right you should thoroughly investigate all the evidence as to hidden gold in your house, which may make it as valuable again as you suppose. And, if you will allow me, I should like to say that I think you might talk the matter over with your daughter before coming to any future arrangement. She has been heart-broken at the thought of giving up her old home."

De Paganel looked in vexed surprise at Melisent, whose eyes were lowered.

"Doth he speak true, my child?" he asked.

"I could not believe," she murmured, "that you would give up the house of our fathers to strangers. It did rend my heart.

"It is therefore perfectly clear to me," Newman went on, "that I have nothing to do but beat a retreat, with what grace I may. All I ask of you now is a chance of explaining to you, later on, the position in which I have been placed, and my reason for acting as I have done. Until then I beg you to suspend judgment upon my actions. I will say good-bye now, with many hearty thanks for your unfailing goodwill and hospitality. Worsted as I am, and disappointed in my dearest hopes"—he cast a hungry glance at Melisent—"I cannot altogether regret this experience."

"Before you go, Mr. Newman," said Sir Christopher, coming forward, "I trust you will accept my apology for my hasty and inexcusable words. I have wronged you."

Newman, after a moment's hesitation, held out his hand, and a queer smile twisted his mobile mouth.

"That's all right, Sir Christopher," he replied. "I've not been too civil to you, so I suppose we are quits."

He turned to Melisent.

"Do you forgive me now?" he asked.

She put her hand in his, with a frank look he had never met in her eyes before.

"I do indeed, and I take my dear home from your hands as a gift for which I can never render you thanksgiving enough," she said earnestly, with a little quiver in her musical voice as she added: "And I beg you to pardon all my harsh words and the ill thoughts I have had of you."

He kissed her hand and turned away abruptly.

"I hope," said de Paganel, "that you will not see fit to hurry away from us on account of what has occurred. My regard for you is quite unchanged and my roof shall cover you as long as you care to stay. Pray do not leave us hurriedly."

"Pray do not," Melisent echoed.

"You are both too kind, but I find an excellent reason for my departure in the fact that Lord Darchester is at this moment under your roof, waiting to denounce me," said Newman. "He does not know Ivo Newman from Adam. I wrote the letter of introduction to you, sir, myself. Now you know all and can judge whether Sir Christopher was justified in calling me a knave. Perhaps he will lend me his motor for my good riddance?"

"It is at your service," said Christopher.

"But you must first come into the house and drink a flagon of wine with me," declared his host: "I do insist."

"It grieves me to refuse you, sir, but I decline to meet Lord Darchester."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the Earl himself and another stranger entered the Dragon's Court, led by Verily, who had encountered them on her way to the house with Jehoram Spratt.

"These good gentlemen be tired o' waiting, sir," she protested.

Godwin de Paganel went forward to meet them in his most courtly manner.

"I find no words," he said, "to express my shame at having given you, my old friend, and this gentleman, so tardy a welcome. I trust you will accept my most humble apologies, and I will attempt to afford an

explanation presently. We are overwhelmed and much distraught by certain strange tidings. But, before going further into explanation, may I present you to my Lady Manwood ?"

The Earl and the Lady exchanged salutations.

" This is my only child, Melisent. Sir Christopher Manwood you already know. But I believe you are not yet acquainted with my good friend, Mr. Ivo Newman. Allow me to present him. Mr. Newman—Lord Darchester."

Lady Manwood gasped. The Earl, after a quick glance at Sir Christopher, lifted his hat slightly to Newman, who returned the salute with his unfailing smile.

Not a word was spoken on either side.

" My dear, your father is perfectly adorable !" whispered Lady Manwood aside to Melisent in a tone of immense relief.

EPILOGUE

" Be constant now therefore,
and faithful to the end,
Be carefull how we both may do
to be the other's friend.

" Now let this vow be kept,
exchange thy harte for mine,
So shall two harts be in one brest,
and both of them be thine."

A Faithful Vow of Two Constant Lovers.

" He that holds his Sweetheart true until his day of dying
Lives, of all men that ever breathed, most worthy the envying."

Thomas Campion.

THE day of marvels was drawing to a close over Paganel Garth. Light clouds, floating high in translucent azure, were tinged both east and west with delicate pink, deepening to pure amethyst about the horizon, and a soft lavender haze fell dreamily between earth and sky, glorifying prosaic things as romance glorifies life. A little breeze, full of early summer spices, rose at intervals to ruffle the breast of throstle, merle and passionate nightingale, who still poured forth melody to the darkening trees ; a zephyr so balmy and wooing that no mortal might resist its call, still less a lover. And the responsive hearts of lovers were beating fast at Paganel Garth this night.

In the Court-yard outside her kitchen Verily sat close to her restored sweetheart in joyous conversation that

was full of pardon for all sins of omission and commission, even to his faithless marriage with another. On the terrace before the house Godwin de Paganel paced with his lady love. While Melisent and he who had, till now, been the Gardener, wandered through the leafy alleys of the garden, rapt and murmurous in that new strange happiness which had been born of storms and fears.

There had been wonderful discoveries indeed since the dawning of that day. The verdict of the expert Sir Christopher had engaged to test the metal found 'beneath the Dragon's belly,' had coincided perfectly with his own judgment and shown that his claim to the discovery of pure gold was well-founded. But there had not been time to investigate his theory that the gold had been manufactured by human hands, through the agency of the potent element which science claimed to have recently discovered. That element, of such extraordinary subtlety and combining power that it seemed to hold possibilities as yet undreamt of, must have been, according to Christopher, in some unaccountable way known to Ansculf de Paganel in the sixteenth century; but the substantiation of such a claim would require a far more exhaustive research, far more definite evidence, than he was able to afford within the measure of a day. It would probably take months to prove his hypothesis. But, whether hoarded in the subterranean chamber as an ingredient of the precious metal to be attempted, or whether as a result of fusing and combining the many substances known to Alchemy under a number of quaint symbolical terms, the gold was there in pure ingots, true gold of the highest quality.

At any other time in his life Christopher Manwood

would have been inordinately excited and engrossed by this secret of the Middle Ages he had brought to light. His whole time and attention would have been devoted to the prosecution of further experiments, to prove the discovery he had made, or believed he had made, that the Alchemists had been real chemists, the scientific men of their day, and had not laboured in vain; although it had been expedient to conceal the fruit of such labour in order to avoid the penalties attached to the loathed practices of Black Magic, with which their art had been so unjustly confused. For years he had been working towards this end, and had collected a large mass of testimony in favour of his theory, upon which this disclosure of Ansculf de Paganel's Secret put the coping-stone. But to-day, in the full flush of his success, he was possessed by a different spirit, the true and vital essence of life and youth, which finds in love the elixir of all joys and seeks all light, all truth and knowledge, from one woman's eyes.

And so, instead of talking long about the treasure in the Alchemist's kitchen beneath the Dragon's Court, Christopher spoke with Melisent more of the garden in which they had enjoyed such sweet toil together; of that toil and the fruit thereof, the dear green children springing from Mother Earth at their behest; the thrilling music of the nightingale, the beauty of the opal sky, all the lovely sights and sounds and scents of nature which seem, in like moments, especially created to enhance the rapture of lovers. For when the passion of love reaches its full height it becomes almost inarticulate and can only take refuge in poetic trivialities. Heaven knows what lovers would have done without the moon and stars, the trees and flowers!

At last, when they had arrived at the Dragon's Court and seated themselves there, where Melisent had sat with Ivo Newman that morning (and what ages ago it seemed !) speech failed altogether. They could only sit still and look at the Dragon, crouching in the half light, with its menacing jaws raised skyward and its sinuous form coiled heavily in the grass, as it had crouched and coiled for over three centuries. Then, when the silence became oppressive and Melisent was afraid to breathe, Christopher said :

" Melisent, I told you once I would not touch your hand till I could prove myself worthy to ask for it. I feel now that I can never be worthy, and yet I ask for that little hand. We have sown the seeds of love together ; shall we gather the flowers ? You must have seen long ago how it has been with your Gardener—how the rose's thorn has pierced him. Rose of all the world, will you heal that wound ?"

She gave him her hand without a word, and in the swimming eyes she raised to his he read all that he wanted to know.

Presently she said : " 'Twas I who pressed the rose to my heart and was pierced, because I did think . . ." She hesitated.

" Because you loved the Gardener — you, a de Paganel, stooped to love a humble labouring man. How it must have hurt your pride, sweet Melisent ! And yet you did—you *did*. The knowledge of that gives me my keenest pleasure now. But I want to hear you confess it. I want to hear the sweetest truth from the sweetest lips."

" I do confess to you I loved Kit Swithun," she said, " though never would I confess it to myself."

"And you love Christopher?"

"I do confess that too."

"Two in one day—fickle maid! But I will cure you of loving my rival, Swithun. He was an ingrate, a false traitor. He deceived you, Melisent."

"I will believe no word against Swithun," she declared, entering into his humour. "He was the best friend I ever had."

"And yet he played upon your innocent credulity, practised a most unwarrantable deception to cheat you! Can you forgive him when I tell you that he was the Spectre you saw in the Library and more than once, here in the Dragon's Court?—that rascal Swithun and no ghastly visitant from the under-world, as you believed."

Melisent's face grew very serious. This was no matter for light jesting with her.

"Was it truly . . . truly you?" she asked.

"It was Swithun. You see, he wanted to search the Library, and the only way to make himself secure against interlopers was to frighten them away. He did not expect that his lady Melisent would be the interloper. The disguise was effected for Mr. Newman's special benefit, and——"

"Then you spent nights in the Library before I admitted you," she said.

"Yes. But it pleased me better to be there with your consent. Did I frighten you very much that night, Sweet?"

"No . . . yes—but yet you did comfort me, for the sign you gave, at my prayer, seemed to me a promise of protection."

"As indeed it was," he assured her.

"But how witless you must have thought me—how

easily duped and superstitious! As bad as Verily, forsooth."

"I could not have a thought of you that was not to your honour and worship," he answered low.

There was a pause. Then she said:—

"But—but the more I think on it, the more I could swear 'twas my forefather I beheld. The unearthly light . . . the . . ."

"We chemists learn strange ways," he said, smiling, "and, where imagination aids us, we can work wonders by our modern magic."

Again she was silent, thinking. When she spoke again it was to say dubiously:

"Methinks you should have to wife one wiser than I—you who are so wondrous learned and great. Will you not weary of my foolishness?"

"Does one weary of the sun's light?"

"But indeed I marvel much how you can wish to wed one so simple and ignorant."

"And I marvel much that I wish to wed at all," he declared; "I never wished it, or thought to wish it, until I saw you. Which proves logically to my mind that you must be the wisest, as well as the most witching and worshipful of womankind, since nothing less could so vanquish me and change my mind. Such is my vainglorious reasoning."

"I fear me it is not good reasoning," she replied, "and I can give better for my belief that there is no man like to you. Wouldst hear how I know it? Because he who finds the Philosopher's Stone must be—

> "'A pious, holy, and religious man,
> One free from mortal sin,'

so we are told, and I truly believe it. 'Great mysteries are to great souls revealed.' Hath not great

mystery been revealed to thee—the Dragon's Secret? Who then could doubt thy greatness?"

Her words, her sweet voice and shining eyes, the tender 'thee' and 'thy' he loved to hear, smote the very chords of his heart and set them trembling. He longed to take her in his arms, but her ethereal beauty in the opal light, and that strange clairvoyance he always felt beside her, of her spirit's shining through her body's grace, held natural desire in check. He dared not touch her.

But Melisent was no ethereal being, no creature of moonlight and dew. She was a very human woman and her longing was even as his.

"And oh, how I do love thee, Swithun!" she cried, in a sudden rapture defying all timidity, and let her two soft arms fall about his neck. The spell was broken and he held her in a passionate embrace.

* * * * *

They sat there long, with clasped hands, dazed and half dreaming, as thousands of lovers have sat, in that pure ecstasy which flesh and spirit combine to make perfect; lost in each other and unconscious of flying hours. The nightingale alone was left in the black trees to chant aloud the silent music of their hearts; Pearl leaped and danced after little white moths unheeded; the great yew hedges breathed their virile fragrance; a red fox and a brown rabbit glided past in search of prey; the Dragon now and then emitted a faint whispered sound; and, in the far distance, the Church tower tolled the hour of eleven. Still they did not move until the outer world broke in upon them, through the appearance of Lady Manwood and Godwin de Paganel.

"I knew we should find them here," said the lady,

rustling in her silken gown across the grass silvered in starlit dew, "and I'll be bound they have no idea of the time, although the Church clock has just struck. Leave Melisent to me a moment, Christopher. I have been wanting a few words with her all day. And I am sure you have something to say to Mr. de Paganel. Is it not so?"

"I have indeed—a great boon to crave of him," answered Christopher, rising. As he went away, Lady Manwood seated herself beside Melisent and took her hand.

"Will you try and forgive me, child, and love me a little?" she asked humbly, all her airs and graces cast aside; "for indeed I love your father very sincerely, and it would spoil my happiness, as well as his, if I could not win his daughter's affection. Will you try—for his sake?"

"It will not be hard, methinks," said Melisent simply, "now that I . . . understand."

* * * * *

Verily was parting from her Jehoram in the Courtyard.

"Well, good-bye, old lass, for the present," he said, in his deep sea-foggy voice that was to her so much sweeter than the liquid melody of the nightingale ringing about the old walls. "There won't be no call to part again after a month come Sunday."

"Ah, Jehoram," she cried, clinging to him, "thou can'st not know what it hath been all these long and dreary years to live wanting ye. It hath surely wellnigh broke the heart of thy faithful Verily."

"Bless my stars if ye've ever been outer my thoughts since the missus died," he declared, a trifle discomposed

by her words, which had a decided ring of reproach in them.

"But you loved her, Jehoram, or you wouldn't ha' wed her," cried Verily; "the fond heart o' one loving woman was not enow for ye."

"Well, you see"—he hesitated and cleared his throat loudly: "We poor human men ain't like angels, which some o' you women are, and sailors ain't like lords as can have serving wenches and footmen and the like to wait on 'em. I had to get someone to do fer me when I were alone, and I couldn't ax you to come so fur. So I just made believe as she was you and you was her; and it all comes to the same thing in the end. 'Specially as I'm come home to marry you now, true and faithful. You can't get over that."

"I ha' no wish to get over it, Jehoram."

"I'm saved a tidy bit up for my old age," he went on, "and I know you'll make me comfor'ble, Verily. A man who's been bummocked about all over the blanky earth and briny ocean for thirty year wants a bit o' rest and comfort when he comes to port. We'll settle down, my lass, like a pair o' purrin' turtle doves."

He gave her a smacking kiss on her cheek and lurched away across the Court-yard, trolling the burden of a shanty. Verily watched him disappear and then went back to the kitchen, where she plumped herself down on her knees before the dying embers of the fire.

"Our Father," she whispered breathlessly, "which art in Heaven: hallowed be Thy name, and heartfelt thanks from Thy most humblest servant, Verily Trew, for bringing home her man safe and sound to wed her, when Thou might'st ha' drowned him in the briny sea, and also for mercifully removing the poor body who hath been wife to him for a while. Bless him, O

Father, and make Verily a good girl. For ever and ever, Amen."

She rose, wiping her streaming eyes with her apron. It was late, but the supper things still lay upon the table, and the kitchen was not in its usual apple-pie order. She set herself to make it so, and as she worked, crooned joyously. The shining brass and copper faces of pots and pans upon the walls seemed to smile down on her, like household gods showering blessings. And this is what she sang to them, in her voice like an old cracked bell :

" ' Lavander is for lovers true,
which evermore be faine,
Desiring alwaies for to have
some pleasure in their paine.
And when that they obtainèd have
the love that they desire ;
Then have they all their perfect joie,
and quenchèd is the fire.' "

THE END

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